



Stay where you are. Don't do anything.

Whatever happens, don't do anything until you hear from the authorities; your safety cannot be guaranteed if you take it upon yourself to act.

Stay in your homes, cars or shopping centers. If you stay at home, watch television or listen to loud music. During the day, remember that there is no safer place for you than on the job. If you are too young to work, go to school. For your own good, do as you are told.

The authorities remind you: The streets of your community are not safe, so if you must leave your home, to seek entertainment or diversion, drive, do not walk to your destination. If you find yourself unexpectedly on the street on foot, speak to no one.

Remember that the maintenance of order rests solely upon your willingness to follow instructions.

COMMUNICATING VESSELS

Issue 20, Fall/Winter 2008-2009



IN THIS ISSUE: *Forty Years Since 1968, Letters Column, Recommended Reading, The State Of The Book And Bookselling In America, Maxwell Street In The Sixties, Maxwell Street Forever!, Food As Utopia, An Alchemical Dream, Fourierism, How This Was Produced, Mary Low: The Dream And Memory, and MORE*

RETORT GOES TO A PARTY

By Holley Cantline

Editor's note: The following piece is from the Autumn, 1951 issue of Retort journal. Retort was a journal of anarchism, poetry, literature and thoughtful essays. Paul Mattick, Kenneth Rexroth, Ammon Hennacy, Paul Goodman and Kenneth Patchen wrote poems and essays for it. It is a virtually unknown publication. The editor, Holley Cantline, was an amazingly wonderful writer and thinker. He handed every issue of Retort with foundry type. The March! reprinted a sampling of essays from it in 1987 and this piece is taken from that reprint. I tend to get a similar feeling of boredom and routine when I attend most parties.

On last March 24th, in Greenwich Village, a party was thrown for the ostensible purpose of commemorating the 1920s. The editors of *Retort*, being at the time on one of their occasional visits to New York, attended. It was a fairly large party – upward of 100 people, most of them costumed in the styles of the period – either authentic or reasonably faithful representations. There was a competent Dixieland jazz band and an adequate amount of drink, the price of admission being a bottle. The party was held in a commodious sculptor's studio on the top floor of a loft building in a non-residential section of the Village, so there was both plenty of room and sufficient isolation to permit complete freedom from the usual urban inhibitions about noise.

Yet, in spite of all these manifest advantages, the party, as a party, and especially as an attempt to recapture the spirit of the '20s, didn't really come off. There was a good deal of boisterousness, some fairly wild dancing, and a determined effort on the part of the sponsors to keep things moving, but the atmosphere was not at all that of the period that was supposed to be commemorated, and the level of intensity that a really good party attains was never observable. The present writer, who has a very warm feeling for the '20s, perhaps because he was just a little too young to take part in the revels of that era, but old enough to have witnessed some of them, stayed on to the bitter end, hoping that

something might turn up, but unfortunately the evening just wilted away, and when at 3 or 4 in the morning the last remaining revelers began looking for their coats, it was as if nothing had happened.

To the connoisseur of parties – and in the '20s, the party was an art form with many zealous devotees, not a few of whom gave their lives as a result of their single-minded dedication to art – a party is not really successful unless something happens other than the usual banalities of passings out, corner seductions, et al. Exactly what is supposed to happen is impossible to foresee (this is the chief charm of the party as an art form). At some point in the evening, usually well after midnight, when the more inhibited guests have gone home and the rest are sufficiently liquored up to be ready for anything, a sort of spirit of the party begins to take over, fusing the participants into a spontaneous organic whole which is capable of

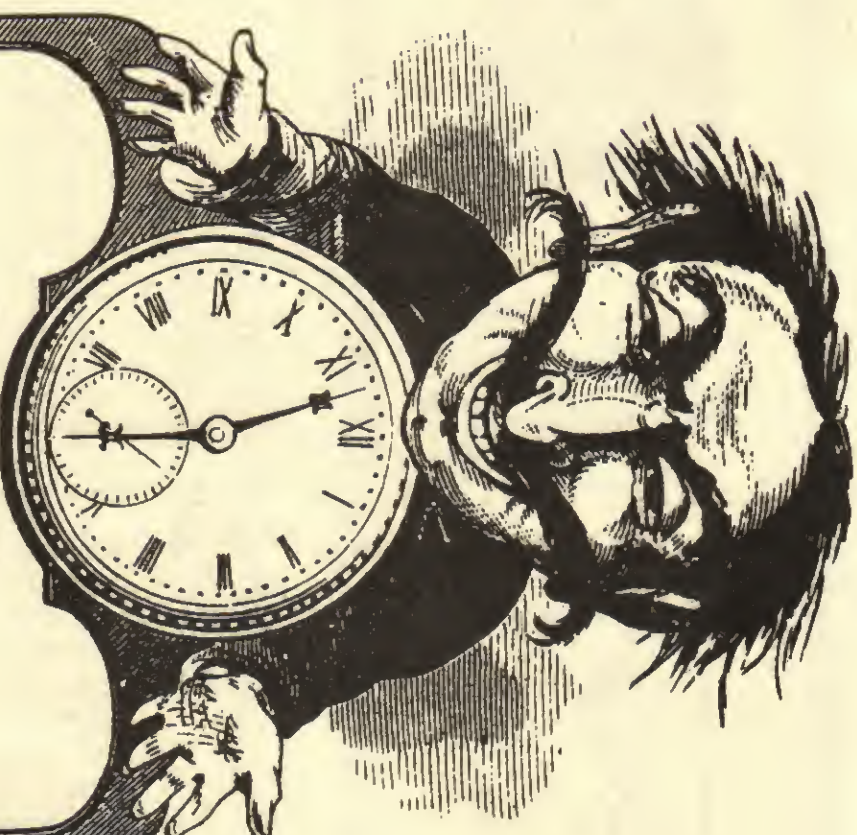
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No e-mail. You will have to pick up the enclosed envelope, a pen and a stamp if you want to get in contact. There is also no website or MySpace page for this publication. Such mediums are contrary to the spirit of this publication. And if we spent time building websites, it would take time away from our true passion: producing a creative and literate publication. Just because "everybody else" has a website *does not* mean we need one as well.

Subscriptions are now available on a donation basis. Give what you can. And if you cannot give anything that is fine as well. Please send cash or equivalent in US postage stamps.

W



Hey You Don't Be Shy

I am, not that scary looking. Look me in the eye. I urge you to take the time to donate a bit of money to the publication you now hold in your hands (cash only, please). Nothing will be held against you if you request a subscription and only have a few stamps to spare. After all, we are not running your typical capitalist operation here. This is a labor of love, and if you write to us – look closely: we've even included a preaddressed envelope that was printed with foundry type – you will receive an issue of this publication in the mail every so often. If I am really scaring you with my clock, eyes and welcoming hands, you are now ordered to continue looking at your television set. That is an order, guys and gals.

Contact our sales agent and resident subversive idea smuggler at:

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W



MARY LOW: THE DREAM AND MEMORY 1912-2007

It was only recently brought to my attention that the surrealist poet, political agitator, classical studies scholar and teacher Mary Low died in Miami, Florida on January 9, 2007. Born in London on May 14, 1912, Low fought in the Spanish Civil War and revolution and her and her husband, Juan Brea, wrote about their experiences in the insightful book, *Red Spanish Notebook*. It is an excellent firsthand account of that period in Spanish history, probably the most intimate and personal written on the subject.

Low also wrote a number of poetry books and remains a favorite poet of the editor of this journal. Within days of receiving notice of her death I discovered a dream I had written down. The dream was about Mary Low. The dream entry was dated mid-January 2007. The difference between the entry and her actual death was only off by a few days.

The dream went something like this: a friend of mine contacted Mary Low through unknown means. My friend arranged this as a gift to me. Mary Low agreed to make the trip out here. A person from the train company was instructed to put a slip of paper in my mailbox at home. The idea was to let me know me if the train was going to be on time. I found the slip of paper – which resembled a postcard – in the mailbox and it read “an hour on time,” whatever that meant. I was confused about the mystery of it and what it was trying to tell me. The dream ended there – before I

had a chance to greet and meet Mary Low.

As you can see, I never got to meet her in my dream or in real life. Nonetheless, her presence hasn't evaporated from the pages of her books. Here is an example of an encounter you can have with Mary Low without having met her:

Encounter

Since we first met
I have known
the intimate joy of scissors,
sleek cats and nutmeg,
the tears of blind music at night,
and whisper of fire among cinders.

Since first we met
all stairs and flowers
grow spurs for me;
and palm-trees whip me with their hair
in sundry mirrors.

The small hours open their wounds for me
to the sound of flutes
that shake my heart.

Since first we met
I feel like omega:
full of warm silk,
endless and groundless.

This is not one of Low's strongest poems. Even so, it fits with what I am trying to present here: the printed word can live on for decades, centuries, even eons. The combination of letters and the order of letters is like alchemy. I am convinced that Low's poems and writings on Spain in the 1930s will have a place when we transcend this chilling world. People will then encounter the beauty of her life and words.

Maybe I will have the chance to meet you in my dreams again one day, Mary. But if not, I bid you a farewell, and when I want to remember you I will read one of your poems.



very curious and memorable acts. At the party in question, the focal point of the evening was the so-called Charleston Contest, and had the party been sufficiently alive, this could have been the spark that started things moving. As it turned out it was merely an exhibition of rather extreme dancing (none of it the Charleston) with most of the people reduced to spectators while a dwindling number of couples competed. I can recall parties in the '20s when an event of this nature suddenly evolved into a mock revival meeting or voodoo ceremony, with everyone taking part, or at least experiencing the excitement – a sort of pseudo-religious ecstasy that could be quite breathtaking.

Of course, such a performance is only possible in an entirely spontaneous and abandoned atmosphere, and the heavy aura of self-consciousness that hung over this party was a serious detriment to even bogus spirituality. Perhaps we who have endured the terrible '40s are unable to recapture the fine, free and essentially naive gusto for wickedness that characterized the lighter side of the '20s. The '20s, despite the fond belief of its Flaming Youth, was – at least in perspective – a very innocent period. There was something ingenious and good-natured about its revolt against Victorianism. The bottomless pit that the First World War had opened up before the Lost Generation was a shallow ditch compared to that which our generation has witnessed, and the



THE STATUS OF THE PROJECT

The incredible response to the last issue has made me realize that there is hope for this project. I received an overwhelming number of letters, subscriptions and donations based on people's interest in the last two issues. It is my idea that I will be able to extend and increase the number of people reading this publication.

In this issue I am not going to list all of those people who contributed money to the project. In the next issue I hope to revert back to that practice I started in the last issue.

I will, however, thank Eberhardt Press for their support and continued enthusiasm for this publication; Fred Woodworth for the hours he has spent teaching me skills – through the mail and in person – I would not be able to learn elsewhere; and Penelope and Franklin Rosemont whose unyielding encouragement for years now has contributed to making this publication stronger. I am not trying to say that any of the people listed above are more important than the rest of the readership. Far from it. Nonetheless, all of the folks listed above have been invaluable. They helped shape what this publication is today. And for that I am grateful to them.

EDITORIAL: FORTY YEARS SINCE 1968

Tie yourself to a star and sail with it.
-Henrik Ibsen

Let's not fool ourselves. The year 1968 was characterized by incredible social ferment. But today we frequently look back on 1968 and the 1960s in general with nostalgia mixed with myth. It is undeniably true that to many people at the time it felt like anything was possible. Soldiers, workers and students were rebelling against an out of control war in Southeast Asia and there was a conscious recognition of how deeply impersonal and dehumanizing society had become. This understanding of reality contrasted sharply with what the mainstream of society wanted people to believe: that everything was well and good in the Western world because the ability to purchase a vast array of commodities had been extended to everyone. No longer was the luxury pool and three-car garage reserved for a wealthy elite. Following the Second World War working class people started to see themselves as consumers first and foremost. The television, cheap food and the automobile symbolized upward mobility in social status and subsequent immobility in social action.

Aside from the Hungarian revolution of 1956, demonstrations against nuclear weapons throughout the 1950s and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1957, the 1950s was the decade of social quietism and conformity. Joseph McCarthy was accusing Hollywood celebrities and prominent political figures of being Communists, Communist sympathizers and spies for the Soviet Union. The trials viewed on television put fear and submission into the hearts and minds of numerous Americans. If you as much as uttered a word against the state of things, you ran the potential risk of being imprisoned, or so the logic went.

But by the early-to-mid-1960s the tide had turned. Congress of Racial Equality chapters sprang up and the Students for a Democratic Society had formed. America and the world were breaking out of the mold and enough people started to become fed up with racial discrimination, wars, sexual and social repression, wage labor, sexism and general alienation and social estrangement.

If we regard the 1950s as the decade of the nuclear family, mass suburbanization and the spread of commodities on a large scale, the 1960s was the direct opposite: a reaction against the staid squareness of the 1950s. In France in May-June of 1968 there was a significant movement which united workers, students and peasants together. It was a general strike which put the French state on the defensive. In the streets of Paris colorful slogans such as "Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible," "Imagination to Power," adorned walls and banners. There was a noticeably utopian element to it all. Students and workers came together in public forums in the belief that they *could* their lives and thereby society as a whole.

Unfortunately, May 1968 in France has become in many ways a grand myth and clichéd reference point. In large measure, the social context of the events that occurred in France have given way to simplistic and decontextualized interpretations. To understand the background is important. France in the 1960s had been undergoing remarkable transformations. Due to De Gaulist policies, France started to shift more and more in the direction of rapid industrialization. For better or worse, the intimate nature of the traditional economy of France was changing to one that was centralized and impersonal. Big business was displacing smaller business and that engendered dissatisfaction among citizens.

HOW THIS ISSUE WAS PRODUCED

In past issues of *Communicating Vessels* we have had our masters scanned into a computer, plates made and then printed by our friends at Eberhardt Press. Except for the cover, this issue departs from that process. We are now making our own aluminum lithographic plates through contact prints burned in a frame onto the plate.

Let me explain. No, it doesn't involve expensive and bulky equipment. Everything you need to do this with fits into a large box and then you can store it away in a closet. But it does involve practice, patience, time and a bit of skill.

Fred Woodworth - who has been publishing and printing the admirable anarchist journal *The Match!* since 1969 - and I connected and he offered to provide lessons through the mail which would allow me to learn this process. He has been extremely generous and helpful.

Fred apparently developed this method because some of his old supplies started to oxidize and he was unable to continue buying those supplies. He had to shift to other ways of doing things. These other ways of doing prepress work couldn't involve buying an expensive plateburner and camera. He eventually - just as he started to experiment with contact negatives - built his own seven-foot-long camera from lenses a subscriber to *The Match!* found abandoned in a lot in Belgium. This meant he didn't have to use the contact negative method for exposing film any longer.

I have done experiments with contact negatives and have had fairly successful results. I even experimented a bit with half tones.

But let me tell you how it works. The first step is to make xerox copies of your masters and etch out with an x-acto knife black spots and imperfections (you can't use white out because it will show up on your negative) or tear out those spots from the paper. You now take a frame with a piece of glass on it and a piece of foam on the bottom. Place your negative on top of the foam and your xerox copy face down on the negative. Turn on a 15-25 watt light bulb that has been placed a few feet away from your frame. The exposure time will vary based on the distance between the light and the frame and the wattage of the light bulb. Once

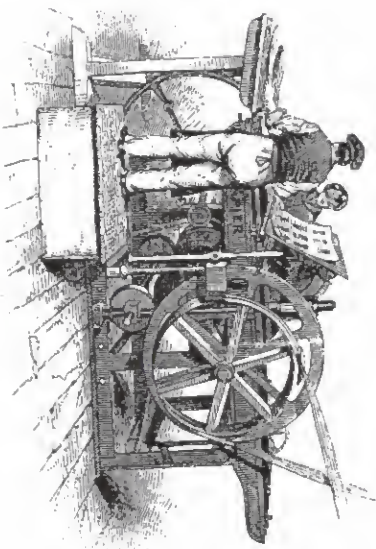
you've exposed your negatives you develop and fix them in developer and fixer and let them dry.

Now it is time to burn the negatives onto your aluminum lithographic plates. Take your frame and place your lithographic plate down on the foam and then put your negative on top of that. Clamps are used in order to allow pressure to be placed on the negative and lithographic plate. Bring it out into the sun and expose it. Exposure time will vary because of the variable nature of the ultraviolet rays the sun gives off. Then develop the plate with plate developer.

These rough instructions are just that: rough. You will *not* be able to create quality negatives and plates from these primitive instructions. I just wanted to give you, the reader, an idea of how the process works. Once you get into the process and *understand* how it works it can be quite exhilarating. If you are sloppy, lazy or disinterested in how processes work, what has been outlined here is probably not for you.

Fred also restored and donated a small tabletop Multigraph letterpress from the early 1910s to this project. If all went as planned, you can see the beautiful work this machine is capable of doing on the front and back cover. The apparatus is nearly a hundred years old and it is still cranking out quality copy.

The next step is to get rid of this crummy computer that will essentially be unusable after this issue. The computer I use is an insult to the art of typography and the only font that looks decent when printed in the body of an article is Times New Roman. The purchase of a few non-computerized typesetting machines will eventually rectify this problem.



ascending and descending streams of taste and ability, and three in the center for balance. At least five groups would form a series, again with a center and wings. There would be a series for every conceivable occupation, and the members could move freely from one to another. Each person might work no more than an hour or two in any one series, so that all would find complete fulfillment. Unpleasant work like garbage removal would be performed by junior battalions of children, who would be encouraged to find tasks like cleaning privies great fun. Each family would have a separate apartment in the phalanstery, which would also have a center and two wings, and there would be theatres, concert halls, libraries, community dining rooms, counsel chambers, schools, nurseries, and all public amenities. The fourth side of the square would be closed by the barns, warehouses, and workshops, and on the center plaza the groups would be mustered each morning and marched to their work with music playing and banners flying. The phalanx would be financed by the sale of shares of stock, but every member need not be a stockholder, nor every stockholder a member. Work would be paid for and the worker would be charged rent and other expenses. At the end of the year the profits of the phalanx would be divided, five-twelfths to labor, four-twelfths to capital and three-twelfths to skill. Seven-eighths of the members would be farmers and mechanics, and the rest professionals, artists, scientists, and capitalists. There would be no discontent or discrimination, since all roles would be interchangeable. There would be a Chancellery of the Court of Love, and Corporations of Love, and an extraordinary system of organized polygamy. Not only sex, but food and all other sensual pleasures, would be organized to give maximum pleasure.

Fourier did not limit himself to reorganizing society. His utopia found its place in a fantastic cosmology. The stars and planets are animals

like ourselves, he thought. They are born, mate, grow old, and die as we. The average life of a planet is eighty thousand years, half spent in ascending vibrations and half in descending; there are thirty-two periods of the earth, of which we are now in the fifth. When we reach the eighth, the Great Harmony will be consummated, and men will grow tails, with eyes on the tip. Dead bodies will be turned into interstellar perfume. Six new moons will appear. The sea will change into lemonade, and all fierce and noxious animals and insects will be transformed into sweet and gentle anti-lions, anti-rats, and anti-bugs. Then the phalanxes, numbering exactly 2,985,984, will spread over the earth, which will become one great Community of Love, ruled over by an Omniarch, three Augusts, twelve Caesars, forty-eight empresses, one hundred and forty-four Caliphs and five hundred and seventy-six sultans.

In his later years Fourier ran advertisements in the newspapers, saying that he would be home at a certain hour every day to meet with any capitalist who wished to invest in the future, found a phalanx, and possibly become a sultan or a caliph. No one ever came, but as time went by he gathered around himself a small group led by Victor Considerant, who in 1832 launched a Fourierist movement with a newspaper, *Le Phalanster*, which ran under various names until it was suppressed by Louis Napoleon in 1850. A community was established in 1832 near Paris, but failed almost immediately. There were no attempts of any importance after that in France. Fourier was patently mad, but Considerant was not. The Fourierists were careful not to emphasize the seas of lemonade and the men with seeing-eye tails. Instead they contrasted the combination of detailed planning and lives of joy, wonder, and sensual pleasure promised by Fourier's phalanxes with the frigid, hard-working, puritanical utopias of his competitors...

University students at the Nanterre and the Sorbonne were becoming less and less interested in their lessons and the state of the world in general. The discontent spilled over into demonstrations and discontent at the Nanterre University in January 1968. The police were called in to quell the students. This was a bad move. Why? Because French society was permeated with the belief that the university was sacred ground. It was viewed as being separate from the rest of society. Residents sympathized with the students and the cops and university officials were believed to be out of line. From there students, workers and even peasants acted in solidarity with one another and came together and proceeded to turn France into a laboratory of high-minded discussion, debate and creativity.

It is, however, quite erroneous to paint the movement in France in May 1968 as an artistic one based purely in realizing personalistic desires. The reality of the situation was something quite different. Workers were taking great risks by going on strikes. Workers often had families to feed and bills to pay. But there was something of a history of strikes and revolutionary upsurges in France that had been occurring for over 100 years and workers had access to that tradition to a certain extent. Yes, May 1968 did have its playful and poetic component, but it wasn't all fun and games.

The hype about May 1968 misses the mark in many places. The Situationists are now the subject of discussion in academia, the art world and radical circles. They are regarded as writing obscure and incomprehensible texts. I even agree that some of the material the Situationist International wrote is marred by its often pompous and jargonized lingo. But that is no excuse for seeming to *deliberately* misconstrue their writings. Many of these people try to bend Situationist ideas to make it seem as if they were concerned merely with pranks and cultural subversion. Nothing could be further from the truth. For better or worse, the Situationist

International venerated workers and workers councils. They were well versed in the history of workers councils in Russia in 1917 and the council movement in Germany in 1918. In addition, they read and studied the works of Dutch left communist theorists like Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek.

If we switch gears we can see that as a whole 1960s expressed a sentiment that was limited in scope and vision: the revolution must happen now or I will give up on it tomorrow. This attitude was a product of its time and is still with us today. The impatience and the desire to see immediate results with very little effort goes along well with our throw away society. Fighting for a better world and adhering to our principles while doing so is indeed an inconvenience. But who ever said the effort to get to a human world is as simple as popping a coin in a vending machine and receiving a result instantaneously? Those people who do cave in probably weren't serious in the first place.

"If you can't beat them, join them." This statement encapsulates the mood of former 1960s agitators and activists who are now living comfortably with lecture tours, seats in various governments, professorships, hotshot book deals and grants for "achievement." Prominent persons associated with the events of 1968 are European Green Party bureaucrats. Certain former members of violence-mongering factions like the Weathermen travel around the world extolling the virtues of their activities during the 1960s. On the other hand, those people who advanced broadly humanistic ideas and acted with sincerity and integrity are seldom heard. In our world, official positions are the ones heard the loudest and thoughtlessness and violent imagery and rhetoric take precedence over thoughtful, imaginative and reasoned understanding and criticism.

Even with its wide contradictions and inconsistencies there are still questions that emerged from the 1960s and May-June 1968 that

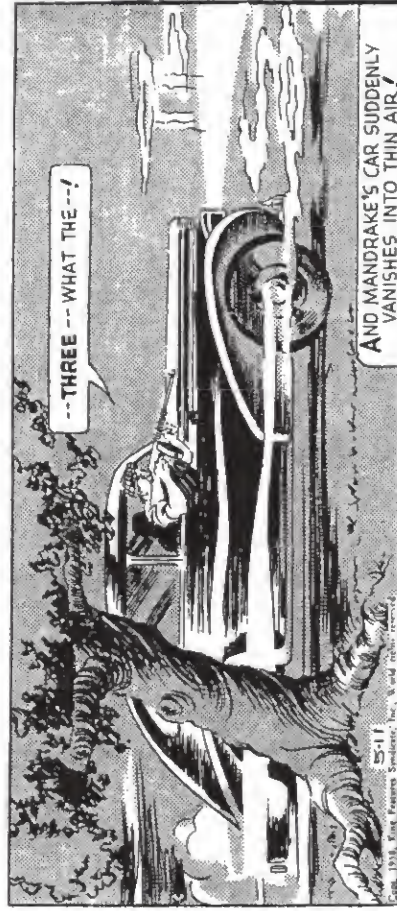
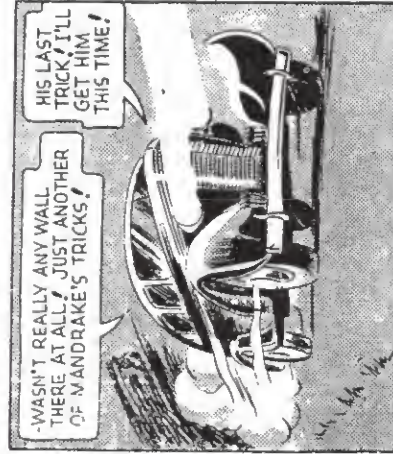
writes and produces. It blew me away and still has that effect on me.

On one of my desperate days of unemployment a few years back – when I was surly and extremely depressed about my financial state – I firmly thought nothing rare or splendid could happen to me. I went downtown with the intention of finding a book that would aid in research I was doing. It wasn't an extremely rare or uncommon book but it had an element of obscurity to it. It was a book tracing the development of relations between Jews and Arabs through the ages. Powell's Books downtown didn't have it so I walked up to a thrift store about eleven blocks away and was determined to find it. Deep down I knew it wouldn't be there. But when I walked to the section containing the history books I noticed it sitting there on the shelf for \$2.99. I was shocked. My sense of overwhelm

caused an employee to ask if I was okay and I told him the story which he found entertaining.

I would never try to explain any of these scenarios as being the "good" work of God, Allah or other such fiction. I prefer to see them with enchantment and mystery while at the same time recognizing how some of them can be explained logically or scientifically. Not having an answer for everything is part of what makes life so richly fascinating and endearing.

As for my friend Rollin' Joe, he has disappeared into thin air like Mandrake the Magician. His whereabouts are a mystery to me and that, I suspect, is an intimate part of what makes him Rollin' Joe.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

might be a little self contradictory, but I liked the thing nonetheless. I've written a review of it for *Hobnail Review* (as advertised in *Communicating Vessels*!).

P.S. *Communicating Vessels* – beautiful production.

Solidarity,
Paul P.
London, England

The Editor Responds:

Paul Petard has contributed illustrations which grace the pages of this publication. And the look of them continues to make me smile and laugh.

Portland is becoming a real pit. The city has been "discovered" and every hipster and yuppie seems to be moving here. From what I've noticed the changes have taken place extremely rapidly. There are reasons for this. The spotlight is on Portland in the media. MTV did a special on Portland's "alternative" music scene and the *New York Times* did a series of articles on "the greatness of Portland." Puke. Gag. Portland also has a very good public transportation infrastructure, probably one of the best in this hellhole of a country. And with rising fuel costs people are realizing Portland is a decent living option. The soil in the area is extremely fertile and rich. It has a long rainy season, but it is bearable once you get used to it.

I am now looking for a place to live and prices for rooms in houses have shot up drastically since the last time I looked in 2004. In addition most of the ads posted by people wanting to rent out rooms in houses nauseate me. It is as if they want your full life history. It is more taxing than looking for employment. And their ads exude ultra-hip pretension which makes me want to scream. There is no way I am going to live with "cool" and "hip" dictators who want to control the way I interact and live my life. These people can go to hell. I want nothing to do with them.

RADICAL LIBRARY IN ALBANIA

Dear *Communicating Vessels* Editors:

RISE OF HOUSING

Greetings Anthony:

I hope you are in good health and Portland is treating you well. I am told Portland is one of just three cities in the United States where house prices are still rising, so I don't know what that indicates. Cheers for *Communicating Vessels* #19. Your comments regarding leftism and Islamism are quite pertinent. I encountered similar problems and conflicts during demos against the bombing of Lebanon in London. However, things have moved on a little here as the "Respect" coalition of Stalinists/Trots/Islamists has had a big internal split, and some of the leftists have got bored flirting with Islamism and are now concentrating on ranting about Venezuela and Cuba instead.

I enclose a pamphlet by Russell "Maroon" Shoatz for you, his argument might not be perfect, and some of the proposals in the "MOSAIC" idea

After writing you from Albania, it seems that our post "services" are not reliable, so we are using a safer way for us to exchange letters.

Ritoridge (sp?) Library Project (RLP) is based in Tirana (Albania) and would like to receive a set of all your back numbers.

RLP is a not for profit free library but we do not have the financial means to buy any foreign independent publications.

In case you are able to help us, use the postal address above. Also any other materials (secondhand books, articles, t-shirts, badges, posters etc.) would be appreciated.

In solidarity,
Roman for RLP
Albania

Contact: RLP Project
c/o Postfach 44
CH 4142 Munchenstein 3

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE LEFT

Hi:

I read *Communicating Vessels* #19 with interest, especially the article on Hamas and Hezbollah which was brought to my attention by a fellow *Fifth Estate* editor.

I belong to a group of anarchists and left communists who are concerned about "left anti-semitism". We see it as openly accepted in "radical" and "anarchist" circles (what does one call *Left Turn*?), sometimes in open forms, but most often in coded themes and especially in unchallenged assumptions. We have a list serve if you'd like to join (unsure of your relationship to the Internet).

Enclosed is a pamphlet April recently did. Copies are \$2 (PO Box 42543, Philadelphia, PA 19101) or free for download @ www.pinteleiyd.com/past.

Would be great if you could do a review for *Communicating Vessels*.

Keep up the good work,
Spencer S.
Brooklyn, NY

THE DESTRUCTION OF LIBRARIES

Dear Anthony:

I really enjoyed the latest issue of *Communicating Vessels*. As always it is beautifully printed (this one perhaps the most gorgeous yet), and I enjoyed the content as well. Your article about Islamism and anti-semitism coincided with my own interest and investigation into that subject. My investigation began with reading and rejecting some of the "anti-German" shit but being intrigued by some of the questions they were asking, even if I did not like their answers. Understanding anti-semitism as a pseudo-critique of finance capital and observing anti-semitism on the left has been eye opening for me. It has helped me reframe conversations I've had with a good friend of mine from Israel about their experiences with anti-semitism in the anarchist/radical scenes in Europe and the US. I apologize for not going into thoughts about your articles more specifically because my brain is not putting thoughts together well this month. But I read and enjoyed it! I've been giving the additional copies you sent to various folks around town.

Have you read any Walter Benjamin? My friend Andy recently gave me his massive work *The Arcades Project*. It is a daunting task to begin reading it, but he suggests it as a way to relax and find new ways of achieving. The translator's introduction gave the story of how the project came together, and I think a history of the work would be quite a book in itself. So much to read as always... I still have not read Rexroth's autobiography.

The other thing I've been reading is a history of surrealism by Nadeau and some of the writings Bataille did on the surrealists. It makes me want to reapproach the classic surrealist texts with a more open mind. I am incredibly drawn to some of the quoted passages by Breton et al. There seems to have been many compelling characters on the fringes of that milieu (and at the center of it), I have some of the Charles H. Kerr books and the American surrealist anthology put out by Automedia. What books would you suggest from the early surrealists in Europe? What do you think of Bataille?

The goings on at the library would drive you crazy. What an easy job but horrid institution!

new world opens up. You start to keep an eye out for off-the-beaten track people and objects - movements, smells, colors, words, sounds take on a new meaning. In a sense, you become an alchemist. When you have the right blend of elements it is amazing what you can stir up and then allow to coagulate to the consistency you desire. The appropriate blend might take days, weeks, months, years or even a lifetime but when it does you realize how wondrous life can sometimes be.

As for me, I let myself fall into scenarios and situations that could easily be compared to the process I've described above. Seeking out the colorful, the vibrant, the exuberant, the unusual can sustain you in this drab and lifeless society. When I was living in Madison, Wisconsin back in 2004 I frequently visited a store that sold primitive masks, books and various kinds of primitive and outsider sculptures. The place was a cluttered mess. The guy who owned it had produced this marvelous dreamscape and the bulk of the people who walked in were either afraid of it or alarmed by how disorganized it *appeared* to be. I would go in with an entirely opposite approach. I would marvel for hours at a time at the random collection of art and books scattered about - the blends, the mismatched colors, the combinations of expressions on the masks were remarkable to experience. Taken as a whole, the masks, books and sculptures formed a situation that I found overwhelmingly fantastic. One day, while I was taking a stroll through the store and catching a glimpse of the pieces on display, I noticed a white and black mask lying at the very bottom of a pile of other masks that didn't do much for me separate from the rest of the art on display in the store. But the white and black mask immediately said something to my psyche and imagination. The intensely-set eyes, strange mouth and protruding eyelashes drew me into its fold. It had a haunting quality to it. When I examined it more closely I was reminded of a preacher. Was it a representation of a Christian colonist? Well, I turned the mask over on its backside and written in pencil were the words "Gus" and "Lukanor Devil Mask". Puzzling. Was it depicting a Christian

preacher? The price tag said it was \$15 so I realized purchasing it was more than worth my while. When I brought it home I investigated where Lukanor is located and it said the Marshall Islands. I will probably never know the meaning of this mask but almost anyone with a sense of style and imagination who enters my room has commented on it. Of all the pieces of art I have encountered or owned this has to be one of the most mysterious and creepy pieces I have laid my eyes on.

The wonder of the world is being striped bare. Nowhere is this more evident than in how countless numbers of people "need" to have a cell-phone pressed against their ear. At the bus stop or on the bus I have difficulty escaping from those mobile devices. But early in the year while I was waiting for the bus a short man seemed to appear out of nowhere. He had a warm personality and an eccentric sort of charm that most "normal" people would regard as a form of insanity. He asked me what time it was with a hoarse voice and we started talking. His manner of dress was working class and perhaps a bit bohemian in a non-contrived kind of way. He mentioned he was something of a Portland folk legend in that he had been playing shows in the area for many, many years. I was then told he goes by the name Rollin' Joe Jordan. The name was created because he used to "roll" to his shows on his bicycle. It was fascinating talking to him about everything from folk music to Pacific Northwest history to the significance of the songs he plays. We met a few other times by chance and he mentioned his CD would be available soon. I gave him my number and he left many messages informing me that it was ready before we finally met again. It was about 9:30 AM or so and I was walking down the porch steps of my house and there he was driving slowly in his car. I yielded "Joe" and he stopped the car and said in his lisp and hoarse voice, "What a trip, hop in." I got his CD and when I listened to it I heard nearly everything we had discussed in each note and lyric on the disc. By that I mean there is something truly infinite and all-encompassing about the music he

An Alchemical Dream

AS MUCH AS I COMPLAIN and express frustration and outrage at the state of the world in general and Portland in particular, there are still moments in life that leave me a state of awe. The universe works in mysterious and not always explainable ways. Religious zealots want to take the wonder and mystery out of it by saying God created it without question. Narrow rationalists, on the other hand, want to explain it away by referring to supposedly irrefutable scientific laws and clear-cut evolutionary outlines. I will be the first to admit that the insights promoted by dyed-in-the-wool rationalists contain countless illuminating insights and truthful assertions. Nonetheless, I remain leery of people who have an explanation for every conceivable occurrence and shift in the universe. This isn't saying I reject the scientific method of arriving at conclusions; nor is it saying that I believe in the balderdash presented by New Agers. What sets off alarm bells in my head is when people use science as a means to thwart or belittle curiosity and imaginative experiment. I think it is possible to recognize the inner dynamics of how something operates or functions without dulling your own sense of the extraordinary and wondrous.

I am reminded of the surrealist Andre Breton and his marvel at Mexican beans jumping around in their pods. Breton knew the logical and scientific reasons why the beans were doing a dance for him. But he was looking at it poetically and refused to merely perceive it as a parasitical infection of the beans by worms. Breton made this statement in relation to his experience with the beans: "Beauty demands that most often one should enjoy before understanding." Similarly, Holley Cantine – editor and publisher of the now obscure mid-20th century anarchist journal, *Retort* – was very taken by alchemy and magic. Though he was firmly committed to logical explanation and rational analysis, he was enthused by occultism because it had the potential to nourish and stimulate his creativity and imaginative sensibilities.

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In my own life, I have always taken an interest in trying to approach things in a colorful and experimental way. In the last few months I have been learning how to make my own contact-negatives for use on this publication. It is a neat process and the reasons why using such a simple method works is not difficult to comprehend. But it still has elements to it that seem like magic. Developing a negative is dazzling. We all know that once a latent image is placed on a negative it is ready to be developed. The chemicals in the developer then act on the negative and produce an image. We understand this. Even so, every time I submerge the negative in the developing tray I feel like I am a magician. Hocus-pocus and there the image is. It might not always turn out perfect but there I am: an alchemist trying to refine the results by giving the negative more or less light or more time in the developing tray.

When you are open to looking at things in a different way, and drift outside of the established ways of relating to processes and other people, a

Somehow the library in Lexington had a copy of Alfred Doblin's novel *Karl and Rosa*, which I'd been meaning to check out and read for some time. When I went to check it out last week I found that it had been "weeded" from the shelves and put out of circulation because it was not circulating enough and wasn't by a famous or award winning author. Fuck that! It's horrible that collections are determined by circulation numbers and not book quality. The public library essentially exists to circulate Stephen King novels, DVDs, and give people a place to play on MySpace. At the suggestion of a coworker I just read a book called *Barbarians at the Gates of the Public Library*. You might be interested in some of the historical points he brings up (like his critique of the Dewey Decimal System), but the book on the whole is not very good. The author gets bogged down in tedious discussions of classic liberal moral philosophy and shit about "enlightened citizens" and "defending democracy." Still, he gives very damning and disturbing evidence of the destruction of public libraries and the slow phasing out of librarians. For pleasure and plenty! If only! If only! Oh to be human for a while, if only!

All the best,
Don
Lexington, KY

A SUBMISSION

Communicating Vessels,

Submitted for publication:

Expanded Version of Thesis on State Capitalism vs. Real Socialism

The central question for every revolution is which class runs the major means of production and the government? If the major means of production are run by a state bureaucracy that is state capitalism. Of course, there are other forms of state capitalism such as in Sweden (a social welfare state) and the USA (social welfare and the regulation of the class struggle – the NLRB and the Taft Hartley Act). However, if the major means of production are run by the working class, then that is real socialism. If the economy is based on money, wages, prices and

commodities then that is capitalism. But if the economy is based on, "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*) that is real socialism or communism. If there is a state, standing army, police, prisons, etc. then it is a capitalist state. But if the voluntary government is of the workers, by the workers and for the workers, then it is real socialism. Real socialism can only work if it is global and ongoing. As Gil Scot Heron said in "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," "The revolution will put you in the driver's seat!"

Obviously, there are no contemporary examples of heroic, working-class attempts at real socialist revolution. But what about historically? Below we list several, including the key reason for their demise:

The Paris Commune Of 1871: French workers seize control of Paris, abolish the state and institute communism economically, but don't disarm the French ruling class, who with the aid of the German army, create a bloodbath of the Parisian workers. Marx adds to his theoretical arsenal the famous, or infamous, depending on your viewpoint, "the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The Russian Revolution Of October, 1917: Under the false banner of "the dictatorship of the proletariat," Lenin et al. shut down the revolutionary factory committee movement, in favor of the trade unions, which they controlled, and the Bolshevik Party hijacked the revolutionary Soviets, leading to "the dictatorship of the party." The last attempt at revolution by the Russian working-class was the Kronstadt Rebellion in the early 1920s, which was drowned in blood by the Red Army, led by Trotsky, and approved by Lenin. Stalin's murderous state capitalism followed and the rest, as they say, is history.

The Hungarian Revolution Of 1956: The Hungarian working-class creates revolutionary workers councils that run production throughout the country, and essentially govern. The Russians invade Hungary with tanks, etc. and put down the revolution militarily.

The French Working-Class General Strike And Mass Student Revolt Of 1968: The "masses were in motion," so to speak, revolutionary motion,

how empowering and exhilarating that must have been! But lacking the goal of real socialism to march forward, this revolutionary upsurge was co-opted through clever reforms by the French ruling class.

The Chilean Agricultural Workers Expropriation Of Landowners In 1973:

Unfortunately these revolutionary takeovers did not find a timely echo among the industrial workers, which resulted in the CIA-led fascist coup of general Pinochet against reformist president Allende, murdering Allende and thousands of revolutionary workers.

All we can do now is take revolutionary inspiration from the spontaneous revolutionary actions of these heroic revolutionary workers of our international class, and convey what real socialism means to fellow workers, engaging in revolutionary dialogue with other revolutionaries and revolutionary-minded workers.

Dave, Diana and Perry
Denver, CO

AMAZED

Greetings *Communicating Vessels*:

I would like to thank you so very much for your latest issue. What a beautiful work of art. If only I could be blessed and have my memoir done, issued and sold in such a classic, clear package. I'm amazed.

The question is: Would your company consider taking my zine to the next level? I'll donate to charity all funds. But whatever you decide, whoever the hell reads this do know I have never ever read such a precious literary gift.

In closing, I thank you once again for your zine, and look forward to your next creation.

Joey T.
Ione, CA

The Editor responds:

Joey is the author of an interesting zine-size memoir called *Bamboozled*, published by Microcosm. If anyone can help him in getting it more widely distributed or even redone, contact him at: Joey Torrey, V-21699: B10 150L, MCSP PO Box 409040, Ione, CA 95640

REAL JOY TO READ

Hello Anthony:

Thank you for getting in touch and sending a copy of your wonderful *Communicating Vessels*. It was a real joy to read. Please could you add my name to your mailing list and send the next couple of issues. I've enclosed a small donation to help cover your costs. I've also enclosed the last two issues of *Readers Digest*! I hope you find something of interest buried within these little tales. Number 9 should be out later this year so let me know if you want a copy and I'll send one over. Take care until next time and thanks once again for taking the time to write.

Best wishes,
Dean
Plymouth, England

The Editor Responds:

Dean is the editor of the short but sweet sheet, *Readers Digest*! It is a surreal and fun little publication.

Contact: Readers Digest!
c/o 15 Dartington Walk
Plymouth
Leigham, Devon
PL6 8QA
United Kingdom

COMMENTS

Dear Anthony:

Don't be surprised by the 5-dollar note. An American guy sent it to me (he'd heard about us thanks to the *Communicating Vessels*) and I can't really use it, so it's yours.

I've just skipped through a review of the *Communicating Vessels* in *Anarchy* - positive. I felt.

I agree with your paper on Hamas, etc. You may have heard of the "veil debate" that's been going on in France (less now than a few years ago). Militant Muslims are pushing the headscarf on women, I mean Arab or Turkish women living in France. Some teachers (and a variety of people from left to

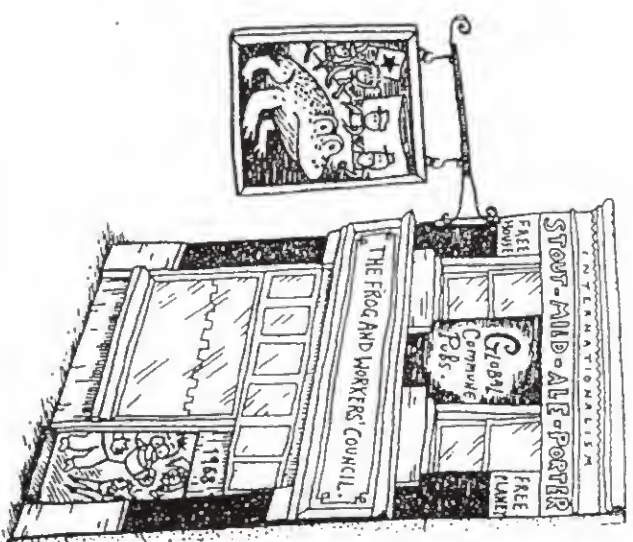
of foods arranged in their panniers under the open sky.

Wander around the survivals of these medieval markets today! Whether they be as drab as the Sunday market in Whitechapel, as spacious as the Plain Palais at Geneva, or as handsomely enthroned as the Straw Market in Florence, they still have some of the human delight of their medieval prototypes. The plastic-coated automation of the American supermarket, with its ghastly fluorescent lighting, its meretricious packaging, its cunningly baited booby traps ("impulse buying"), its poisonous forms of preservative antiseptis, its frozen and flavorless foods, in their artfully arrested decay, presents a contrast that betrays both an esthetic and a physiological as well as a social loss.

This constant education of the senses is the elemental groundwork of all higher forms of education. When it exists in daily life, a community may spare itself the burden of arranging courses in art appreciation. And when it does not exist, such efforts are largely banal and self-defeating, for they deal chiefly in currently fashionable clichés, not in the underlying realities. Where such an environment is lacking, even the rational processes are half starved: verbal mastery, scientific accuracy, cannot make up for such sensory malnutrition. If this is a key, as Mme. Montessori long ago discovered, to the first stages of child's education, it continues to be true even at a later period; for the city has a more constant effect than the formal school.

Life flourishes in this dilation of the senses. Without it, the beat of the pulse is slower, the tone of the muscles is lower, the posture lacks confidence, the finer discriminations of the eye and the touch are lacking, perhaps the will to live itself is defeated. To starve the eye, the ear, the skin, the nose is just as much to court death as to withhold food from the stomach. Though diet was often meager in the Middle Ages, though many comforts for the body were lacking even for those who did not impose penitential

abstinences upon themselves, the most destitute or the most ascetic could not wholly close his eyes to beauty. The town itself was an ever-present work of art; and the very clothes of its citizens on festival days were like a flower garden in bloom. Today one can still capture some of that feeling by following the evening procession on Saint John's day in Florence, from Santa Maria Novella to the Piazza della Signoria.



IN THE PAST TENSE

Past Tense Publications in London sent us a big package of pamphlets. Most of them focus on the hidden aspects of London's radical history. They also publish pamphlets with broader historical themes. The pamphlets are a project of the South London Radical History Group. Contact them at: Past Tense Publications, c/o 56a Info Shop, 56 Crampton Street, London, SE17 0AE, United Kingdom.

ordinary drinking water more gratifying? Even in the matter of smells, sweetness is not entirely on the side of the modern town; but since the smells are *our* smells, many of us blandly fail to notice them.

As for the eye and the ear, there is no doubt where the balance of advantage goes. The majority of medieval towns in these respects were immensely superior to those erected during the last two centuries: is it not mainly for their beauty, indeed, that people still make pilgrimages to them? One awoke in a medieval town to the crowing of the cock, the chirping of birds nesting under the eaves, or to the tolling of the hour in the monastery on the outskirts, perhaps to the chime of bells in the new bell tower in the market square, to announce the beginning of the working day, or the opening of the market. Song rose easily on the lips, from the plain chant of the monks to the refrains of the ballad singer in the marketplace, or that of the apprentice and the housemaid at work. Singing, acting, dancing were still "do-it-yourself" activities.

As late as the seventeenth century, the ability to hold a part in a domestic choral song was rated by Pepys as an indispensable quality in a new serving maid; and medieval music down to his time was composed mainly for the voice, addressed to the singers, rather than the listeners. In their polyphonic unison, each voice held its own, repeating the same melody in its own range, just as each guild and craft held its own within the city, one voice joining the next and going on with the tune, as one guild would join the procession after another, with its banners and floats. In the daily routine, there were work songs, distinct for each craft, often composed to the rhythmic tapping or hammering or swaying of the craftsman himself.

Everywhere nature's noises mingled with man's, Fitz Stephen reported in the twelfth century that the sound of the water mill was a pleasant one amid the green fields of London. At

night there would be complete silence, but for the stirring of animals and the calling of the hours by the town watch. Deep sleep was possible in the medieval town, immune from the ulcerating tensions of either human or mechanical noises.

If the ear was stirred, the eye was even more deeply delighted. Every part of the town, beginning with the walls themselves, was conceived and executed as a work of art: even parts of a sacred structure that might be unseen, were still finished as carefully as if they were fully visible, as Ruskin long ago noted: God at least would bear witness to the craftsman's faith and joy. The worker who had walked through the nearby fields or woods on a holiday came back to his stone carving, his wood working, his weaving or gold-smithing, with a rich harvest of impressions to be transferred to his work. The buildings, so far from being musty and " quaint," were as bright and clean as a medieval illumination, if only because they were usually whitewashed with lime, so that all the colors of the image-makers, in glass or polychromed wood, would dance in reflection on the walls, even as the shadows quivered like sprays of lilacs on the facades and the traceries of the more richly carved buildings.

Esthetic discipline might lack a name, for it was never separated from religious symbolism or practical requirements; but its fruits were everywhere visible. Nor was the desire for beauty unconscious: streets were extended, as Braunfels notes, "for the beauty of the city." Did not the citizens of Florence vote as to the type of column that was to be used on their Cathedral? Carved statues, painted walls, corbels, triptyches and screens decorated alike the church, the guild-hall, and the burgher's house. Color and design were everywhere the normal accompaniment of the daily tasks. The array of goods in the open market added to the general visual excitement: velvets and brocades, copper and shining steel, tooled leather and brilliant glass, to say nothing

the same building as the old one (a historical building, actually), but it's been completely done up and renovated. Nicely done, actually, but why spend so much money? As proof of your views, half of the first room is devoted to comic books (meant to appeal to kids) and DVDs (meant to appeal to everyone).

The funny or sad thing is, the assistants are mostly low-paid, unqualified and partly incompetent (*not* their fault, of course). You find Marx and Luther among fiction books. They don't know much about fiction anyway (how would they?).

And of course, on the 2nd floor, there are tables with wi-fi access and you always have half a dozen people with laptops.

So I am not surprised that "L.P.H." is keen on computers. He or she is completely taken by the "information" craze.

Still, as I wrote before, I feel there is a strong continuity between the information age we're going through and the popular press and radio world that has been going on for quite a while. The decisive

right) refuse to admit veiled girls in schools as it's an obvious sign of women being oppressed by men.

On the other hand, a vast array of leftists reply by saying these girls should not be expelled because:

1) schooling is better than staying at home; 2) why make a fuss over the veil and not Christian crosses? ; 3) wearing the veil may be a sign of rebellion on the part of Arab girls against dominant mainstream "white" culture and habits. Needless to say, this third point...misses the point. It's all very confused, especially since those against the veil are firm supporters of the institution of school and state-led education.

Strangely enough, the official Bordiguist paper in France stated quite a few valid ideas on the subject, but totally misunderstood how the veil was and is an instrument of the oppression of women. I am not a feminist, but...

So anything that clarifies this affair is welcome (as was your excellent article on the Middle East).

It was a coincidence that I read your exchange of letters on libraries and the Internet at the same time I was visiting the new public library here. It's



The Little Vendor

Alice Hendrickson

break occurred when the cheap daily press started in the last decades of the 19th century. This must have been a stunning surprise for socialists and anarchists (as much as we are amazed and sometimes horrified by cyber culture).

I'd say I agree with your thesis on conscientious objection in world war one and world war two. In 1914-18, ethical considerations required you to refuse to take part in state-organized mass slaughter. In 1939-45, for most, ethical considerations required you to fight against Nazi-organized mass slaughter. I once read a short text by F.M. Forster who made it quite clear that one had to be a pacifist in 1914, whereas one had to fight fascism in 1939.

You seem to be learning quite a few printing skills which I do not know much about. When you speak of "burning the film onto a lithographic plate in the sun," it sounds unreal. In the sun...I realize how you can feel like a magician.

I remember Fredy Perlman telling me how he and his friends had loved learning how to produce books, not just writing them. I'm not sure I'd be willing or able to do the same, but I can surely understand the feeling of activity and community (as opposed to wage labor work) it provides you with.

Best wishes,
Gilles D.
Compiègne, France

The Editor responds:

As a clarification, when Gilles mentions conscientious objection he is referring to a presentation I did on conscientious objection during the Second World War. The presentation was part of a broader presentation on internationalist responses to war done in Oakland in March 2008. The event was fairly well attended and decent discussions ensued from what we had to say on the subject of internationalist (as opposed to nationalist and national liberationist) responses to war in history. In the letter Gilles wrote he is not suggesting people were correct in going to war in order to fight Nazism. He is merely outlining the dominant trends of that period.

MORE COMMENTS

Dear Anthony:

Thank you very much for sending me the two copies of *Communicating Vessels*, Summer 2007 and Winter/Spring 2008. I shall send them to my friend Jonathan Simecock, editor of *Total Liberty*, a copy of which is enclosed containing one of my articles. He does have a few Trans-Atlantic contacts, Fred Woodworth in Arizona and Joe Peacock in Alaska. Jonathan will send on those two copies to another friend of ours, Peter Good. Also enclosed is a copy of Peter's mag, *The Cunningham Amendment*, beautifully produced and very surreal. Also enclosed is a copy of the front page of a book, the second edition of which I published in 2005 and a bit of copy about me taken from its website. It was the first book published in the U.K. for 25 years on radical social work. We wrote it to be a reference point, a marker of recent history, showing what we did and how it was done.

Re. Summer 2007 issue: p.3: Some comrades would agree with "We can't merely inherit what came before without attempting to synthesize and harness it to what we face today." Other comrades, still carrying authoritarian past baggage insist that there can be no dichotomy – all is either black or white with nothing in the middle. To them a one person business is capitalist. If we contribute anything to a better society, the contribution and what comes from it will be imperfect, full of contradictions because people and groups are full of imperfections.

Re. Winter/Spring 2008 issue: p.14: "Are we all Hamas and Hezbollah? A Critical Look at the Left's Filtration with Islamic Fundamentalism," "Following the ('67) war, large numbers of Israelis started to view their victory in messianic terms." The wording might confuse some readers, condensing a wide set of ideas into a brief space. The Zionist movement at its birth towards the end of the 19th century was left leaning and very cosmopolitan. It contained anarchists, socialists as well as those of messianic outlook. The Spring 2008 edition of *Jewish Socialist*, in an article about

We can buy all the organic and sustainable food we want. We can recycle our glass and plastic bottles, tin cans, paper and grow our own food in a small garden plot. But if we continue to hopscotch around with cell phones glued to our ears and the keys of laptops pressed against our fingers, we remain the same. The same atomized and estranged creatures dehumanized by television, videogames and politicians. Indeed, we are becoming analogous to the social androids presented in prophetic science fiction novels and movies.

Food cannot be separated from what we are discussing here. New visions of the world would inevitably have to integrate food as more than something we utilize to acquire the proper nutrients, vitamins and minerals for our physical functioning. The cherry, apple and other fruit trees that form an essential component of Fourier's utopia are there not only because they nourish the body physically. They are there also because they are stimulating sources of aesthetic beauty and contemplation. They are good for sparking creative and imaginative yearnings and flights of fancy.

In William Morris's utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*, government buildings become storage chambers for heaps of dung. It is only with such an integrative and imaginative view of how the future could be will we be able to go beyond the present reality which is destroying the very land needed to grow food on. With people's minds being cluttered and cheapened by spectacular talking heads and trashy entertainment, I suspect it will take a long time to get to a world where we have healthy food served in banquet halls in a free, convivial environment. It is possible we may never get there. But it is certainly worth dreaming about.

As for me, I will be trying to get my garden in better shape. It is a tiny utopia amidst a sea of depravity and lunacy. I also get to harvest and eat the food that grows in it. The taste of fresh picked tomatoes, kale, beets and basil is divine – a taste, a flavor of a potential utopia.

THE FIVE SENSES By Lewis Mumford (1961)

Editor's note: The following excerpt is from Lewis Mumford's remarkable work, The City in History. It is one of my favorite books. The title is a bit misleading in that Mumford traces the history of human civilization itself in this study, not merely the cities human beings built. His generalizations are a bit too broad and sweeping in places. This comes out in this brief excerpt at times. Mumford, in this passage, also seems to forget that the Middle Ages were characterized by religious intolerance. Nonetheless, Mumford was a real thinker and historian. He was largely self-educated and this might partly explain why he wasn't afraid of saying things people didn't want to hear. The following paragraphs add a welcome tapestry to this issue's special section dealing with utopia and the crisis of the human imagination.

...the medieval town was not merely a stimulating social complex; it was likewise a more thriving biological environment than one might suspect from looking at its decayed remains. There were smoky rooms to endure; but there was also perfume in the garden behind the burghers' houses; for fragrant flowers and herbs were widely cultivated. There was the smell of the barnyard in the street, diminishing in the sixteenth century, except for the growing presence of horses and stables. But there would also be the odor of flowering orchards in the spring, or the scent of the new-mown grain, floating across the fields in early summer.

Cockneys may wrinkle their noses at this combination of rankness and fragrance, but no lover of country ways will be put off by the smell of cow or horse dung. Is the reek of gasoline exhaust, the sour smell of a subway crowd, the pervasive odor of a garbage dump, the sulphurous fumes of a chemical works, the carboLATED rankness of a public lavatory, for that matter, the chlorinated exudation from a glass of

longer dealing with ethics or genuine interest in solving the complex issues we are faced with. "Ecology" and "environmentalism" then become gimmicks - cheap and meaningless buzzwords without real content or substance. Presidential hopeful, John McCain, styles himself as some sort of environmental steward yet wants to bring to fruition 45 nuclear power plants by 2030 if elected president. What a genius idea, John! Tell us more about your ecological intentions, John! I am sure they are inventive and will guarantee a good life for us.

The reality is that until sustainable and healthy food is grown and harvested as a gift in a convivial atmosphere, only the wealthy will be able to afford to buy luxury and boutique-like foodstuffs. As the price of food increases around the globe, we will see more and more Jean Valjean's of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* being imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread out of destitution.

In the United States and around the globe there is little placing itself in the way of a burgeoning food crisis. The economy is precarious and at any moment the world could be paying double or triple for everyday food items. A new social orientation and social sensibility are about the only things that will transform the situation. This would require people to come together and discuss the problems we are faced with. Beyond discussion and discovering new ways of relating and interacting, it would mean rediscovering abandoned and lost life skills. Solving these issues in practical terms means society would have to produce less technicians sitting behind computer screens and more artisans. Farmers, cobblers, blacksmiths, bakers, printers, electricians, carpenters, plumbers and the like would lend their knowledge and experience to help us get out of this mess and start anew.

With regard to agriculture and farming specifically, it will be essential to develop "biointensive" and concentrated ways of growing



sizable sums of food in small spaces. In addition, food crops and fruit and nut trees would have to be reintegrated with the land. The finite nature of oil might make it essential to even dust off the scythe and learn how to use it. There was a time when fossil fuel burning machines weren't used to harvest wheat. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* there is an unforgettable scene in which the main character of the book, Levin, curiously observes peasants mixing backbreaking toil with joyous mirth. They are harvesting wheat with their scythes and there is a certain communal rhythm to their movements and overall activity.

I am not suggesting here that we must go back to the life of peasants in 19th century Czarist Russia. Far from it. Nonetheless, fossil fuel depletion will force us to find other ways of tending to food crops. The emphasis would have to be placed on the durability and general longevity of what we use and consume. The orientation towards tools and food would have to change. The food we eat, the tools we use, then, would take on a new meaning. No longer would we be talking about applying a band-aid to a social problem. We would, instead, be discussing questions of how humans relate to one another, their food, their labor, the natural environment and the tools and technology they use. Perhaps we would realize how the reality that confronts us is ultimately interrelated. Viewed from such a vantage point, the sane conclusion we would draw would be to underline how an obsession with symptoms fails to deal with root causes.

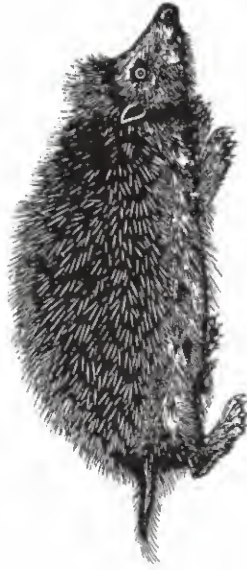
the Bund (a revolutionary, Jewish workers organisation) tells of strong, anti-nationalism and their secular values. These two competing trends, left and right wing Zionism continue until our time,

Kind regards,
Martin G.
Cumbria, England

The Editor responds:

Right. It is a complex subject and that sentence could lead to confusion. Thanks for the clarification.

Letters to the editor are welcome. Address letters to: Communicating Vessels, 3527 NE 15th Avenue #127, Portland, OR 97212 USA



A JOURNAL OF ETHICAL ANARCHISM

The Match! is a consistently accomplished anarchist journal that has been publishing since 1969. The print job is immaculate and the content is always stimulating. Their stance on computers had a formative influence on the editor of this journal. The new issue contains a lucid column about how certain sci-fi writers of the mid-1950s to the late-1960s tried to warn us about the horrors ahead; a satirical piece on the control of opera by bureaucrats and much, much more. Send a cash donation only to this rare publication. *The Match!* P.O. Box 3012, Tucson, AZ 85702.

RECOMMENDED READING

PEOPLE ARE OFTEN SURPRISED when I tell them that I've never been to college. I think most schooling is an immense waste of time. People would be better off traveling for a few years, working on a farm or learning a useful trade like carpentry or plumbing. In the off time one would be able to peruse books and various subjects that interest them at their leisure.

I have no regrets about never attending college. I would have had to study subjects that don't resonate with me and I probably would have spent the bulk of my time arguing with professors. I am not the kiss ass type and the majority of professors want students to confirm their pet notions. I also like to study subjects at my own pace, making my own deadlines and working details out in my own way.

Once I graduated from high school, I was relieved. Relieved that I wouldn't have to be in the stifling environment of school anymore. I drew up my own lesson plans and proceeded to follow through with them. After a 40-hour workweek, I read and took notes on multiple subjects. Unlike most people's "education," my self-education has never ended. I am constantly learning, both practically and intellectually. I never get bored. I am always keeping myself creatively and intellectually stimulated.

Learning and growing and developing. These are fundamental aspects of life. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to experience evolution and growth in your creative and intellectual capacities.

Kenneth Rexroth does a remarkable job of exploring this in both of his books on the classics: *Classics Revisited* and *More Classics Revisited*. He suggests that the classics, with their epic heroes and heroines and cast of characters, were at heart speaking about the human condition in general. The tragedy of war, the timelessness of love, the changing of the seasons, the passage of time and the search for the meaning of life are brought out in the classics of Western and Eastern literature and poetry. Some of the classics Rexroth explores I regard as unnecessary reading and better stories, richer lessons and deeper etched characters can be

found in dime novels.

Nonetheless, Rexroth's always entertaining, nonacademic and witty insights on the classics turned me on to books I otherwise might not have known about. In a huge way, Rexroth was one of my mentors who I never met. He is dead now, but I have learned far more from him about literature and poetry than *any* stifling and square college course on literature could have taught me. Far from making learning boring or a task to be completed with a sullen and downcast face, Rexroth's writings on the classics provided me with an education I could have never received elsewhere. For that reason alone, I urge readers to check out his two books on the classics.

THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN your laughter cannot be contained. I felt this way when I read through Franklin Rosemont's *Jacques and the Roots of Surrealism*. If you are looking for a tiring academic biography of Vache and his life, you should probably look elsewhere. This book brings to life the character known as Jacques Vache. I would rate it as one of the most enjoyable and hilarious books I've read in the last year.

A book that is equally excellent for different reasons is Penelope Rosemont's *Dreams and Everyday Life*. It chronicles her experiences during the 1960s. It is far, far above the mountains of garbage being published on the 1960s. Penelope travels with her husband, Franklin, to Paris and meets the Surrealist Group and Andre Breton. She joins the Students for a Democratic Society and learns how to print. She helps to bring life back into the then stagnant Industrial Workers of the World. The book is infused with high-minded commentary and wise reflections on the 1960s you probably will not find in any other place. This book, I hope, will be a key reference point for people a hundred years from now. I cannot adequately express my enthusiasm and admiration for this book. You will just have to order a copy and read it yourself. Copies of both Franklin and Penelope's books can be ordered from: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1740 West Greenleaf Avenue, Chicago, IL 60626.

What was the East Village in New York City like before it became a hotbed of skyrocketing



rents, condominiums and ultra-gentrification? Well, Yuri Kapralov tells that story in his book *Once There Was A Village*. He paints a picture of the stabbings, shootings, riots and gang warfare during the 1960s and 1970s. A neighborhood of Slav immigrants and Latinos, he describes the ethnic conflicts and strife. But even with the doom and gloom he presents a sense of camaraderie and solidarity that he had with a few of his neighbors. The style lends itself to impressionistic images of the life he was living there. He makes an effort to show how life could be better through writing and painting. I found this book by accident one day and will probably read it again at some stage.

A while ago I finished reading a Rexroth recommended book: *The Diary of John Woolman*. Woolman was a Quaker abolitionist who refused to wear cotton and eat sugar because they were products of the slave trade. He preached against the practice of slavery amongst Quakers in his own quiet and subtle way. It takes getting used to reading but once you do you will discover that it is a perceptive and *honest* examination of one man's conscience. Even if you aren't religious, this work still offers profound thoughts and musings on life and slavery.

At the moment I am reading *Pages from the Concord Journal*, written by the brothers Jules and Edmond Concord. It is another Rexroth recommended work. The brothers have splendid and colorful observations of France during the last-half of the 19th century. They are far from being politically correct. They *hate* women and have an almost homosexual love for one another. If you want to get a pulse and panorama of France, literary life and sympathetic observations of poor and working people during that period, this book is a

As corny and clichéd as it sounds, food has the ability to draw people together. It also has the potential to ignite massive anger and social upheaval. We are seeing such a phenomenon taking place now in ultra-impoveryished countries such as Haiti, Mexico and Africa. Food has undergone hyperinflation in those areas and poor and working class people are now unable to feed themselves even meagerly.

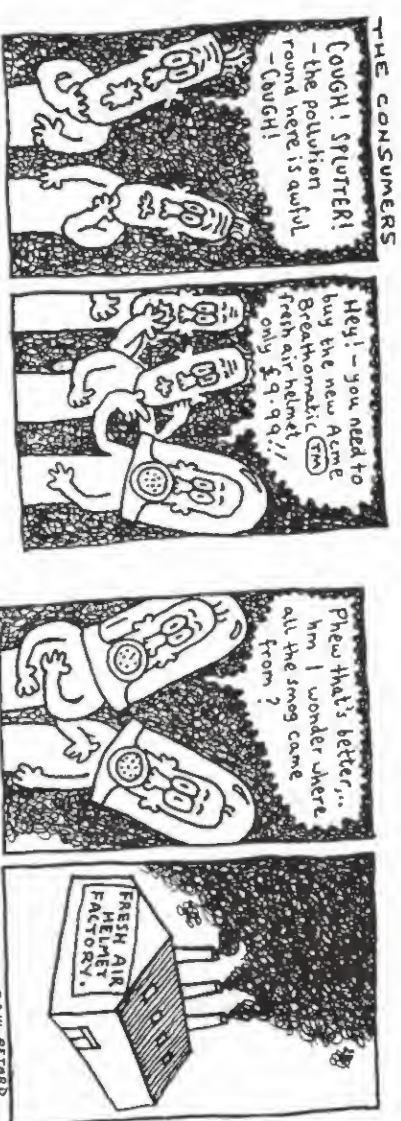
If we look at the positive attributes of food beyond treating it as merely a commodity, we can discover its sensual and seductive qualities. Poets and painters and utopians have made constant reference to the erotic and colorful aspects of fruits and flowers. The paintings of Bosch or Brueghel offer a delightful entrance into a world where food isn't just eaten - it's held in the highest regard as an aesthetic delight of it own.

The simple beauty of preparing a home cooked meal and sharing it with others has a value in its own right. The smells can be like a potion or elixir that draw spirits and minds together at least for a brief moment. I am reminded of the surreal films of Luis Bunuel. In the majority of his films the centerpiece is people gathered around a table drinking wine and enjoying an exquisite medley of food. In Charles Fourier's seductive and dazzling utopia, food is consumed in high quantities at communal

banquets.

The shift to largely mechanized systems to produce grains, fruits and vegetables has made food available on a massive scale. The dependence on fossil fuels and chemicals has, however, brought with it wasted lands and an immense amount of air pollution. For reasons of survival alone alternatives will need to be implemented.

The alternatives cannot be merely instrumental or technical. When we go into a store and decide to purchase organic instead of conventional produce we are still masking and obscuring what was produced by someone else's labor. With such an approach we are back to square one: the buying and selling of impersonal commodities. "Alternatives" are a reflection of the society they emerge from. If we view ourselves and the natural world as things to be used and exploited and bought and sold, we will continue to use and exploit and buy and sell in a slightly less harmful way even if we adopt a concern for the environment. Indeed, the words ecology and environmentalism have been drained of meaning. They are "chic" and "fashionable" words used by politicians and aspiring entrepreneurs to garner votes at the polls and patrons to their businesses. When the overriding question is one of quantifying and crunching numbers in order to prove the extent of your "ecological" commitment, we are no





The Willamette Valley is renowned for its rich and productive soil. A gigantic variety of fruits and vegetables thrive in this region's soil. Grapes, kiwis, cherries, peaches, pears, apples, figs – we could expand the list to infinity. I am blown away by what I stumble upon at work or even walking down the street. The bounty is breathtaking.

But this season everything is behind schedule. The unpredictable weather has pushed the growth of plants and the flowering and growth of fruit on trees back by weeks – perhaps even a month or two. My large garden plot hasn't been doing well. I planted a huge amount of seeds and have had little success with them. A few roots are coming up and my winter squash, arugula and lettuce are faring well. I intended to can a ton of vegetables because of the high food prices. It looks like a kibosh has been put on those plans.

Last year in this same garden plot of eight large raised beds I harvested an enormous sum of food. I also had cosmos, zinnias, mixed flowers and sunflowers growing. The flowers are thriving this year, but, as I said, my vegetables aren't making much headway.

I love to be a part of the process of nurturing seeds to life. Watching a seed gradually grow and mature as you tend to it is magical. But this year it was like nothing wanted to be part of the process. The seeds were rebelling. The conditions weren't right for them.

I have always had a utopian vision of what food and food growing could potentially become. I remember quite fondly standing by grandfather's side as he expressed his wisdom regarding seeds, seedlings and general gardening. He had a garden that was like a paradise to me when I was a young child. The raspberry bushes were extremely productive and the amount of food he was able to grow in that backyard space was astonishing. Much of it was canned by my grandmother or frozen. It was an entirely different mindset than my parent's who accepted buying food from the store as a given and didn't think about canning or having a supply of food to fall back on in an emergency. My grandparents, for better or worse, lived through the Great Depression of the 1930s and carried with them certain notions of scarcity based upon their experience with food shortages. In addition, my grandfather's father was from the countryside of Lithuania and he imparted a love for growing food and an overall independent know-how into my grandfather. There was still an agrarian sensibility my grandfather possessed that hadn't yet been entirely destroyed by television, the newspapers and fixations on becoming rich and famous.

There was a utopia in my grandfather's backyard. At least that was the way I saw it when I spent time at his house in the summer. He might have been hard to get along with and abusive to me at times, but I loved visiting his garden and spending hours in it. The food we were growing together and then eating helped bridge the divide between our ages and his at times mean-spirited and authoritarian personality.

delight. I have the Roger Baldick translation in a handsome hardcover edition I located for a small sum of cash.

Ever wonder about the history of the books in America? Look no further than *The Book in America* by Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt. It is a relatively old book – from 1951 – but it gives a glimpse into the role books played in colonial America until late 1940-1951. It is a rather sad story. Quality books never gained the kind of following in America that they deserved and still deserve. In Europe people are much better read and knowledgeable than your typical American.

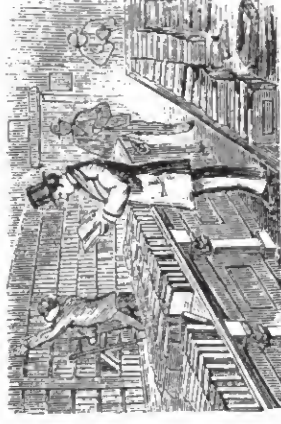
I had undervalued the works of Raymond Chandler after reading a few of his novels. I recently went and read through his entire set of novels and was amazed by his wit and his remarkable writing abilities. I prefer his later novels where he takes his contempt for cops, the law and the inhumanity of the world to shining heights of bravery. *Playback* is probably his most daring. *The Lady in the Lake* and *The Long Goodbye* rank high as well. *The Little Sister* is not so good.

Prison Etiquette edited by Holley Cantine and Dachine Rainer is a rock solid examination of prison life during the Second World War. In this book conscientious objectors write about their experiences in prison. It was originally handset by Holley Cantine and produced as a limited edition underground work. But the Southern Illinois University Press released a new edition of it in 2001. They scanned in the original and tacked on a new introduction. It is well worth checking out.

Considerations on the Assassination of Gerard Lebovici by Guy Debord is something I just read. It is available in an overpriced edition. They are charging \$15 for a book that can be read in about an hour and a half. The price is a huge scam. The book itself attacks journalists and the media for suggesting he murdered his patron, Gerard Lebovici. It is well written and is free of the Hegelian metaphysical jargon that tainted his other works. He is dealing with a concrete situation and his understandable venom shines through in the prose.

WE NOW ARRIVE AT THE END of our

recommended reading column for this issue. I sure do hope you found something that might be of interest to you here. It can be hard to maneuver your way through the sheer number of books available. I am sure that you will, however, find what you are looking for if you look hard enough. After all, one of the best parts about searching for books is the search itself. The adventure and uncertainty of the search can sometimes be a higher delight than the actual book.



THE CRADLE OF LIBERTY

Having grown up in the Boston area I found the pamphlet, *Rocking the Cradle of Liberty: A Guide to Anarchist-Connected Historical Sites in Boston*, to be immensely stimulating. I now realize that some of the old places I used to walk by have a rich history. The pamphlet was written by Joe Peacock and Jerry Kaplan. From the same address you can also order the publication, *Anchorage Anarchy*. I would send \$5 for the pamphlet and \$1 for a copy of the latest *Anchorage Anarchy*. BAD Press, P.O. Box 230332, Anchorage, AK 99523-0332.

The State Of The Book And Bookselling In America

BOOKS HAVE ALWAYS fascinated me. At a very young age I was taken by an illustrated version of *Hiawatha*, the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. I recently had the copy I used to constantly read and refer to as a child sent to me by my folks. The illustrator of the version I received from my aunt as a gift and cherished as a child was Susan Jeffers. I can now see why I held it in such high esteem. The illustrations are still stirring even to my now refined artistic sensibilities, and they have an otherworldly quality to them. Maybe I am biased. The book, I suspect, is permanently etched into my genetic wiring at this point. I looked at it repeatedly as a child and relished the epic poem that accompanied the illustrations. The poem has lost a certain amount of its charm, but I can still appreciate it. Hiawatha's journey reminds me of Huckleberry Finn's youthful goose-stepping and Odysseus' trek through nights and days of varying weather patterns and climates.

I have next to no doubt that my obsession with this short book partially influenced my later direction in life. In a way, books aided how my mind and imagination developed. I used to have my parents assist me with sewing and gathering materials in order to make elaborate costumes. I would design based on the *Lone Ranger*, *Hiawatha*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and various fiction and nonfiction books I got out of the library on clowns and the circus. Without these books – television is an inferior substitute for images in books and those that your mind conjures up from reading books – I doubt you would be browsing through the publication you now hold in your hands.

* * *

FAST FORWARD TO THE present. Because of my lifelong love of books I found myself applying for jobs at bookstores during a long period of unemployment while living here in Portland. I finally got a call back and subsequent interview from Borders Books. When I went in for the interview it was almost instantly evident that I had the job. A few days later I interviewed with the general store manager and after that I was officially granted the position.

I was going to be paid a little over minimum wage to rise at 4:15 AM so I could be there at 6:00 AM, five days a week. But I accepted it for the moment because I was nearly broke, and I would at least be around books.

My position was to shelve books and put out the daily arrival of periodicals. I worked with approximately five or six others as part of what they called the Inventory Processing Team. For the most part, my coworkers were fun to be around and engage in tasks with. The fact that we seemed to get along quite well made the time spent in a corporate retail environment pass fairly quickly.

The corporate book world is a strange place to spend time at – particularly if you are a serious reader. Anyone who has set foot in one knows the aim is to attract all different kinds of people, not just literary snobs. The idea is to create a consumer democracy in the store. For that reason, the store is equipped with tons and tons of gimmicks known as sidelines or ephemera. Freud dolls and Harry Potter stickers clutter the store. If somebody comes in and fails to buy a book, there is a chance that they will



FOOD AS UTOPIA: FOOD AND UTOPIA

For years now I have worked in the produce section of various natural food stores. I currently work at a food cooperative. I don't make much, but I feel that it is an ethical way of making a living. A few days a week I am stocking fruits and vegetables of various shapes, sizes, weights, textures and colors. There is a contemplative beauty to the process of placing them and marveling over the distinct attributes of each one. Because it is a food cooperative the store tends to sell a wide array of unusual produce. Chirimoya, cardoon, burdock are a random sampling of some of what is available.

It is still a wage labor job and I don't like the idea of having to work for someone else to provide bread on the table. While keeping that in

mind it can, however, be rewarding to educate and discuss food and the food crisis with people.

Here in the Willamette Valley the weather had been cloudy and cooler than usual this growing season. In mid-June the weather started to change. The sort of cloudy and relatively cool weather that lingered on is not ideal for growing food in any capacity – whether it is in a small garden plot or a small-scale farm. The produce coming into the store has reflected this. The bunches of kale have been tiny and not all that healthy looking. What is more, the cost of locally grown organic or sustainable produce has gone up drastically. The price of food has increased across the board. The combination of fuel spikes and bad weather conditions has led to a food crisis.

instruments, lamps, books, records, tools, Venetian blinds, herbs and spices, antiques, toys, jewelry, snake-oil, plumbing fixtures, pillows, timepieces, radios, African masks, household furnishings, clothes, Mexican food, tires, clothes, magazines, paint, paintings, prints, posters, statues, sports equipment, hood ornaments, goldfish bowls, sunglasses, balloons and a seemingly limitless supply of the world's most wonderful junk – all in splendid juxtaposition that is itself the very stuff that poetry is made of.

Not surprisingly, no place in Chicago is more popular on Sunday mornings. The thousands – tens of thousands on warm days – who gather here to see the sights, listen to blues and saunter in the sun, clearly recognize Maxwell Street as one of the city's greatest treasures: vastly more marvelous than the "Magnificent Mile"; more educational than the Museum of Science and Industry; more fun than any of the official multi-million-dollar extravaganzas at Grant Park or Soldier Field.

The destruction of such a haven, for any reason, would be a tragedy. But to destroy it in order to expand what is probably the ugliest college campus in the country would be a travesty.

For our part, we would infinitely prefer to see the entire Circle Campus razed and its grounds used for the expansion of Maxwell Street.

We realize, of course, that the special qualities which endear Maxwell Street to us, and to all freedom-loving people – the qualities variously called "primitive," pre-industrial, medieval, carnival-like and anarchic – are the very factors that condemn it in the eyes of bureaucrats, Chambers of Commerce, and other mean-spirited mercenaries who hate all freedom except the freedom to exploit and bully others.

And that is why all those who love and delight in Maxwell Street must now raise their voices and let their feelings be known. We must unite and act now, without delay, to save the

street from the devastation planned for it by insensitive functionaries who regard their petty administrative ambitions as more important than the good of all.

We must drive home the point that Maxwell Street is not merely another historic landmark or crumbling monument, but an irreplaceable part of our lives, an irreplaceable part of the lives of all who live in Chicago and all who come here, an irreplaceable part of the life of the city itself. The respite Maxwell Street affords from the monolithic uniformity and regimentation of the daily grind is not a dispensable trifle but a vital necessity for us all.

Maxwell Street is a gift to be enjoyed, not a "problem" to be solved. To the Circle Campus bosses, the City Council, "city-planners" and others who know nothing of life in the city, we say: Let Maxwell Street alone! Let it flourish! Let it grow!

*One of the most insightful contributions to the current discussions is the letter of a recent immigrant from Ghana, Nana Kow Bondzie, published in the *Tribune* for Friday, October 1 (Section 1, page 18). Here are a few brief passages from this remarkable testimony: "The parallels between this unique American marketplace and its counterparts in Africa today are striking....In Africa and in Maxwell Street, it is in the marketplace that strangers as well as familiar people meet to exchange goods and opinions, to listen to musical performances and to hear important announcements of interest to the local community....That Maxwell Street evolved rather than was planned undoubtedly makes it an organic and important part of Chicago. In Africa, clear and abundant evidence remains of traditional marketplaces existing and evolving alongside modern institutions. So too can Maxwell Street exist alongside and with the University....In sum, the Maxwell Street market deserves to be preserved because it forms an essential part of the historical landscape of Chicago and it represents what is best about America."

purchase a stuffed animal. And why shouldn't they? It is all about consumer choice not, by god, selling those heady bound together pieces of paper with words printed on them.

To be frank, working at Borders made me even more cynical about the overall decline in literacy in this country. I did a large share of customer service while working there and I was shocked and shaken to discover that most of the people coming in hadn't read a book in months, and, in some cases, years. And this is in a city that advertises itself as being far ahead of the nation in terms of literacy and cultural achievement. As much as I loved and appreciated my coworkers, I also noticed that much of their leisure reading time was devoted to contemporary graphic novels and bestsellers.

I ended up quitting when they were talking about introducing mandatory headsets. There was absolutely positively no way I was ever going to wear a device on my ear. I would rather have been scouring through dumpsters for a meal than place such an apparatus on my head in order to stay afloat financially. Other people I worked with had similar sentiments on the matter. But trying to organize in order to better conditions and wages didn't seem likely. A few of us talked to the local ILWU chapter and realized what a task it would have been. Most workers saw their job as being merely temporary, and the stress, potential job loss and aggravation of trying to do such organizing work were viewed as being a burden rather than a benefit. But the labor practices of Borders were abominable. The scheduling for part time employees like myself shifted regularly. During periods of steady and brisk business, the hours they gave me were around thirty-five and during slow times they would hover around twenty-five or so. Not stable enough to live off of. And the wages were a joke. Raises were nonexistent and workers were expected to accept that.

These factors, taken together, soured my sentiments on the retail book world as a whole.

My enthusiasm for retail bookselling waned and I quit the job.

* * *

THE OBSERVATIONS I MADE while working at Borders are intimately connected to the decline in reading in general and the subsequent cultural and social decay we are experiencing in the United States as a result. There are reasons for this. The first is connected to the historical disdain Americans have tended to have for literacy and culture. Books *never* really had a huge resonance with the American public. But if we go back in history a tiny bit we will see that the contemporary disdain for books, learning and culture reaches levels unseen in American history.

After the Second World War the nature of bookselling changed in America. For better or worse, bookselling was confined largely to major cities in the period before the rise of suburban sprawl and mass consumerism. Following the Second World War we saw something new: the chain bookstore. The chain bookstore set up shop in the suburbs and focused on providing a department store-like atmosphere for people who otherwise might have felt intimidated by the possibly elitist urban bookseller. In this new bookselling environment the seller of books didn't necessarily have to be a lover a books. He or she was selling a product like any other product, a commodity, a thing. In this environment, there was no reason to present the book as being a continuation of Johannes Gutenberg and the Enlightenment's effort to sway minds and shake the complacent.

Bookselling during the late 19th century and early-to-mid 20th century was frequently regarded as catering to the elite and already well-educated. This characterization is not entirely accurate. The tireless publisher, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, succeeded in releasing over



LITTLE BLUE BOOKS
Editor
E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS

1,500 different titles and sold 500 million books under the name Little Blue Book Company until he died in 1951 (Haldeman-Julius' son continued running the company when his dad died, but car culture, the television and suburbanization superseded the interest once held in Little Blue Books, and the number of books released following Haldeman-Julius' death was minimal). This was at a time when selling books in that amount was unheard of. He was able to do this because he sold his books as inexpensive paperbacks and wasn't elitist in his approach. The books he sold were read and enjoyed by millions of working class people. He wasn't publishing junk. In fact, Haldeman-Julius insisted on publishing the highest quality literature, history, philosophy, classics. He even said once that, "There is literally no subject to which I will not give a hearing." Inevitably this got him into trouble when religious fanatics and the F.B.I. realized what he was publishing. Religious authorities burned books he published on atheism and sexuality and the F.B.I. never stopped hounding him. He referred to himself as "Mr. Public," and sought to release books that

any sane and rational human being would want to be familiar with. There was a philosophy behind what he did: in his autobiography he called it "The Triumph of the Idea." What does that mean?

...the end of cultural, intellectual, economic, and political subservience and inferiority. There are men, rich and powerful, who shudder at the thought of a free world – free thinking, free living, sane behavior, mass health and happiness, individual freedom and social responsibility, the right to candid speech on any possible subject. They live on lies. I don't merely disapprove of them. I more than dislike them. I hate them with an implacable hatred. Enemies at the other extreme are numerous and anonymous – the legions of the ignorant, the millions of dupes of the powerful few who control the rotten press, the contemptible radio, the insipid movies, the stinking church, the merciless czars of the industries, the mind-crippling schools, and all the other filthy forces of body-breaking reaction.

The Little Blue Book Company was not the only publisher that aimed to subvert the state, the nuclear family, the economy, the church and dominant social and intellectual trends. The Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company was founded in 1886 and it operates today on a much smaller scale and releases a steady stream of high quality books each year. The original instigator of Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company was a man named Charles Hope Kerr. He was a libertarian socialist, vegetarian and agitator who wanted to make works on economics, ecology, history available to working class people. And he published things mainstream publishers wouldn't have touched with a ten-foot pole. The fact that it operates in the year 2008 is reason to celebrate its continued existence. It has had its ups and downs but the consistent quality of the Kerr Publishing

MAXWELL STREET FOREVER! By The Chicago Surrealist Group (October 1993)

Editor's note: The following declaration was a leaflet The Chicago Surrealist Group produced when word was heard that the University of Illinois wanted to expand its campus. The demolition took place around the year 2000. Maxwell Street had long been a staple of life for Chicagoans on Sundays, as Penelope Rosemont recounts in her article, "Maxwell Street in the Sixties." In a way, Maxwell Street was a utopia set in an otherwise congested and polluted urban wasteland. The only street fairs or parties now allowed in American cities are those that are permitted, tame, "sanitized," commercially sponsored and filled with hotheaded merchandisers. Superstar rock bands dominate the fold, and cops harass "loitering" homeless people during such events.

"Official" parties in the street offer us nothing but the same buy and sell routine and authoritarian control we have grown accustomed to. Bureaucrats in the City Council determining what is and isn't permissible within city limits should be regarded with mockery and contempt. Let us restore the spirit and dream of Maxwell Street and allow many of them around the world to flower and take root!

If you were forced to live in a desert, what would you think of a tiny privileged clique who, solely for motives of malice and greed, planned to destroy the nearest oasis? That is the situation today regarding Chicago's celebrated Maxwell Street.

The imminent destruction of this glorious century-old open-air market is threatened by the sinister cabal who runs the nearby University of Illinois at Circle Campus, aided and abetted by an agency that is practically a synonym for doing the wrong thing: the Chicago City Council.

That Maxwell Street is an oasis – an oasis of freedom and pleasure in a wasteland of misery and boredom – is one of those plain, universally-agreed-on truths that we refuse to argue about. In a society increasingly totalitarian, in which police rule is steadily invading life's every nook and cranny, Maxwell Street remains a kind of *free territory* where human beings can actually relate to each other as human beings rather than as victims, slaves, informers, spies, order-givers and order-takers.

Nowhere in Chicago do the many races and ethnicities that make up the city's population mingle on such a scale with greater freedom and equality, or with higher spirits, than in the delightfully liberated zone known all over the world as Maxwell Street.

Indeed, international observers have proclaimed it a place unique in the United States, and praised it highly.* Certainly there is nothing even remotely like it in or near Chicago. For many us, it is the single most *interesting* place in the entire city. Happily untainted by the reactionary crowd-control school of urbanism concocted by that pompous con-man, Daniel Burnham, Maxwell Street is virtually the opposite of a "mall." Bourgeois and authoritarian prejudices – discipline, order, neatness, punctuality, obedience, hierarchy – have little meaning here where music, dancing, carefree wandering and joyful discovery are the pleasures of the day.

Maxwell Street is a living example of creative disorder at its brightest and most spontaneous: a kind of festival or carnival or, if you prefer, the best theater in town. All who come are strolling players at a sprawling, multidimensional, free-for-all fair, where the worries and woes of the workaday world give way to the exuberant enjoyment of an unparalleled promenade through a waking dreamtime of color, scent and sound.

Here, too, if one likes, one can buy or barter for fresh fruit and vegetables, musical

woman in a tight red dress walked up to the singer and, with flair and drama, reached into the bosom of her low-cut dress and pulled out a derringer. "I'm going to kill you, you low down bastard!" she announced. Hardly anything ever interrupted a Maxwell Street blues band, but his time they all stopped playing immediately. The entire audience, as if they had been well practiced, took cover or threw themselves on the ground in one quick motion.

John said, "Now, darling, I'm real sorry. Please don't shoot!" Well, she didn't, but she was still pointing the gun at him. Apparently, if someone doesn't shoot in the first couple of minutes it's not likely to happen, because people began getting up from the ground and brushing off their clothes. The irate lady, ruffled feathers soothed, put her gun away and stalked off, and the band went back to playing.

There weren't many women blues musicians at Maxwell Street, but there were some, and wonderful they were. The only woman with her own group was a bluesy gospel singer who also played guitar. Dressed in white – a nurse's white dress, white stockings, white shoes – and very tall, very thin, very dark, she looked like an exotic stork and had graceful but angular stork-like movements.

Once when we were standing in the midst of the crowd on a deliciously hot summer day, the sun was pouring down and she was belting out a song in vibrant rhythmic breaths while stomping around in a circle in her frantic storklike way, flapping her elbows, calling and chanting, "Oh, Je-sus, oh, Je-sus," and a few seconds later, "Oh, free-dom, oh, free-dom!" Suddenly, a man in the front of the crowd went rigid. He dropped his bag of groceries, and stomped right through them. His eyes were shut – he was in a *trance*. The band kept playing; people picked up his groceries and held them for him. The marvelous stork-lady took his hand and led him to the front of the band. There he followed behind the singer, hopping with the throbbing rhythm. She returned to singing that frantic song, putting all her wild heart and soul into it. Finally the song stopped – another moment and I probably would have been up there hopping too, the magnetism was so great. And then the man in a

trance stopped hopping and opened his eyes. He was astonished – and embarrassed to find himself up front with the singer, facing the audience. Disoriented, he asked, "Where's my groceries?" A couple of people came forward and handed him the trampled bag. Really stunned and confused, he left hurriedly. What had happened? Still shaken myself, I didn't know, but it seemed as if my very spirit had grown tired of my body and wanted to slip out and dance, dance, dance and be free.

If you stayed late enough at Maxwell Street, you could get great bargains as the vendors packed up. Then, wandering back through the debris-strewn streets, you knew it wouldn't happen again until the next Sunday. You knew you'd have to work and wait all week, pretend to be interested in the job, put on a show for the boss, but all the time you'd be thinking: I hope it doesn't rain on Sunday. I hope the weather will be warm on Sunday. I'm going to get up early; I'm not going to be late; I'm going to be there when John is tuning up – I don't want to miss a note!

Author's Note: As this book goes to press, I have learned – thanks to Justin O'Brien – that the splendid vocalist described above as the "stork-lady" is in fact Carrie Robinson.



THE CUNNINGHAM AMENDMENT

The Cunningham Amendment is an absolutely gorgeous anarchist publication. Done entirely with letterpress, it is a rare production. There is a cynical and cryptic sense of English humor that goes with it. Send them a generous donation so they can continue their work. Contact: Peter Good, 1005 Huddersfield Road, Bradford BD12 8LP West Yorkshire United Kingdom.

Company is what makes me excited about every new release.

As far as the general place of the book today, it is easy to see that we are at a cultural impasse. The sheer *ignorance* of millions of Americans who sit in front of the television and listen to what demagogues tell them is frightening. The fact that young people are seduced by electronic technology now makes it heresy to suggest and recommend an *actual* book to him or her – one that isn't hooked up to the computer or the Internet. But we know this is progress! Hurrah for progress! Progress means a constant dose of commercials, pop-up ads, text messaging (a language of its own where words are shortened and spelling doesn't matter), erosion of the intellect and creative and critical thinking skills.

The book industry has largely went along with this trend – like a parent giving his children the candy they keep pestering him about. It is trying to survive in a hostile environment and it is better to adapt to it than go belly-up. Or so that is what the book industry giants now proclaim. But it is interesting to note the shift from a craft-like cottage industry to a mega-corporate structure. The consolidation of the industry by conglomerates has hugely affected what is being published and promoted. These mergers have changed the way the book business functions. There was no real lasting "Golden Age" of bookselling in America but the shift to mega-corporate conglomerates has meant businessmen are now determining what will be released. Those sitting in boardrooms crunching numbers are now the key players in the business – not true lovers of literature and the written word. The quality and readability of material being released plays second fiddle to its sellability. When booklovers were calling the shots, they would take a chance on something that might not sell immediately. After all, the true impact of a book might take thirty years or half a century or ten centuries. The essential part is that it should offer

something to its readers – a great writing style, storyline, an unknown piece of history or a stimulating argument. Those concerned exclusively with the bottom line should not be making publishing decisions. If you enter a Barnes & Noble or Borders you will notice that John Grisham, Dean Koontz or Tom Clancy are the authors frequently displayed. The works of these authors *will* not stand the test of time. Like the five-second blockbuster movie sensation, these books are meant to be an instant success until the next two-month hit comes along.

The reality of the situation comes down to this: Books have become another cheapened form of disposable entertainment. Authors are no longer bohemians, eccentrics, renegades or muckraking journalists like H.L. Mencken. And it is becoming increasingly common to find authors who can't even write a legible sentence. No. Authors today – with a few notable exceptions – tend to regard themselves as mainstream people who want to be rich and famous. They want to be the next smashing success story. There is little conflict or confrontation in the works these authors produce. In fact, instead of confronting the reality of the world we live in, the majority of contemporary writers come to terms with it by glossing over its horrors and thereby confirming the status quo.

When your mindset is firmly entrenched in confirming the current reality, the books you write will inevitably look for easy villains and pure victims. Inhumanity, lack of empathy, lack of balance and proportion are the traits of many of the works being released daily. This is in marked contrast to a Raymond Chandler detective story where Marlowe regards the people he encounters as being fundamentally human. Because they are human they have faults, contradictions, strengths and weaknesses. Marlowe realizes that they found themselves caught up in a vicious and cruel world. There are

no simple victims or perpetrators.

Similarly, the interactions Marlowe has with cops and figures of authority like politicians and the wealthy are contradictory. On the one hand, Marlowe recognizes he must deal with them. On the other hand, he loathes and despises their stupidity and petty-mindedness.

Admittedly, pulp novels of the 1930s and 1940s tended to be saturated with violence. This violence, however, was embedded into the novel. Violence was not *the* novel, it was *part* of the novel. In addition, there was a formula to the way most pulp novels were written – even the best ones operated on the level of a formula to an extent.

The majority of successful novelists in the year 2008 don't have the sort of gnawing life concerns that eventually killed Raymond Chandler. I also don't see empathy or a human sensibility in the works of contemporary novelists.

For evidence of this we need only look at the immense success Tim Lahaye's utterly disgusting *Left Behind* series has garnered. Lahaye is so talented at writing that he needs an assistant to write the novels *for him* while he dictates and gets all the credit for his brilliant plotlines and thrilling scenes of apocalypse and carnage. Writing is no longer a craft or form of art that pays the bills. To Lahaye his books are propaganda vehicles for spreading a sick and vile form of evangelism. In the *Left Behind* books authority is unquestionably obeyed, self-righteous zealots dominate virtually every page and god gets his revenge on those who fail to submit to Lahaye's understanding of scripture. There is no empathy or understanding in the pages of *Left Behind*. There is also no talent evident in the writing.

We could endlessly cite novel-after-novel that offer absolutely *nothing* in the way of spark, imaginative ferment or trailblazing insight – but what would be the point? It is obvious that the vast majority of popular contemporary authors

have taken their cues from the business world and are addicted to what the "authorities" in academia, the book industry and the media tell them about writing and literature. The writer is no longer a Renaissance man or woman who has delved deeply into a broad range of subjects. It is difficult to imagine this being so in a time of hyper-specialization and fragmentation.

Indeed, authors now "brand" themselves. The idea is to have your name associated with a particular genre of writing such as mystery, horror, romance or general fiction. This makes having a steady publisher superfluous because your superstar name is what advances your career, not the publisher you've happened to choose at the moment. The relationship between publisher and author has thus changed. A publisher is now solely an economic salesman, not an encouraging and helpful peer. In a parallel way, literary agents are assigned to find the publisher who will be able to sell the most units. This shift has produced an unhealthy reliance on bureaucratic mediators and an inability on the part of the author to converse directly with his or her publisher. The agent does the legwork for the author because that is his specialty. The writer is a writer, pure and simple. His direct input with his publisher is of no consequence or importance. That relationship needs to be mediated through a gigantic chain of command. Well, that is how the system works and far be it for me to think it is insane.

* * *

DURING MY BRIEF STINT at Borders it became readily apparent that bookselling in America is going down the tubes. It was never a huge industry in this country. But the general path of homogenization and standardization corporate bookstores have traveled down is an unsustainable one. I could be wrong. The gizmos and bestsellers have the potential to keep Borders

drunken cop). At Maxwell Street he would let us set up a card table next to his stand where he sold Venetian blind parts. On this table we'd put copies of *Rebel Worker* and other IWW and anarchist literature, and start hawking it. We'd take turns minding the table, arguing with people, soapboxing a little, and then resume wandering around.

Sometimes we'd stop and get an Italian sausage from an old Mexican in a huge black and silver decorated sombrero. He fried his sausages right on the street at a charcoal grill. There were plenty of other grills with chicken, hotdogs, Polish sausage. The smell of Maxwell Street's old junk was neutralized by the spicy smells of cooking food: an authentic "Taste of Chicago."

At Maxwell Street we also bought our fruit and vegetables for the week. Sometimes several of us would buy fifty pounds of potatoes (\$1.50) and split them up.

Best of all, around 11 A.M. the blues musicians would begin to tune up. From way off you could hear them play a few riffs on their guitars as they warmed up. They often played in the back yard of a dilapidated house – hard mud, the grass long gone or maybe never there. They'd run a fifty-foot extension cord up the back stairs into the kitchen, plug in their amplifiers, and they were in business!

Long, tall, one-armed John Wrencher was one of our favorites with his frenzied harmonica-playing, singing and stomping: "My babe, don't stand no cheatin', my babe!" On Sunday the entire world revolved around the spot – there wasn't anywhere else you'd want to be! John and his band would give their all to the magic of the music, playing to large crowds of Blacks, whites, Latinos, Asians, old-timers and kids – everybody who loved the blues.

Wrencher led a quartet with drummer, bass and rhythm guitar. Of all the Maxwell Street blues people, he was the one we came to know best. We talked with him between sets. John Wrencher was a fine musician with a great powerful voice, and he should have been better known.

Usually a band at Maxwell Street would attract sixty to a hundred people in the warm summer weather, sometimes more. They'd play with only short breaks until one or two in the afternoon when

the crowds started melting away. Every now and then, a friend of the band would come through the crowd shaking a cigar box, collecting quarters and dollars for the band.

Crazy as we were about John's music, swaying and stomping from one to another, drifting with the rhythm, sooner or later we'd tear ourselves away because, just down the street, maybe Magic Sam or J.B. Hurt would be playing, and across that lot, Eddie Shaw would be playing. A little further down, Robert Nighthawk would be playing – and behind that bar, Maxwell Street Jimmy would be playing. The man we knew as "Chuck Berry, Jr." would be doing extravagant stunts with his guitar. Old, blind Arvella Grey would be wandering the streets with his steel guitar and tin cup singing "John Henry" with all the dignity and pride of an African prince sauntering through Timbuktu greeting the admiring throng.

They were all great, great musicians! And unforgettable! Maxwell Street was always Chicago's greatest Blues Fest.

One time when John Wrencher was playing near a cross-street, we were standing in the street swaying to his music when a beautiful Black



On Sunday, even in winter, Maxwell Street was always crowded – no, *packed*, packed like no other part of Chicago ever was – not even the Loop at Christmas. I remember going there in the Fifties, as a child with my mother, to a Mexican store on the east side of Halsted where she purchased chili powder by the five-pound bag. It was still there in the Sixties; I bought five-pound bags there myself. My grandmother had grown up around Maxwell Street and used to talk about going to the Twelfth Street Store as if it were a trip to heaven. She claimed she had sold matches in the street at age five. She'd pretend to be ashamed of this – ashamed of having been so poor – but really she was proud of it (she was in fact the toughest and proudest person I've ever known).

In the Sixties the Twelfth Street Store was still going strong – a good place to get bargains in sheets and bedding. Indeed, a lot of the old buildings were still standing, and still occupied. It was a poor area, but it didn't look like a bombed-out Beirut as it has in recent years.

We'd usually stop at what we called the Voodoo Drugstore (on the southwest corner of Halsted and Maxwell) just to soak up the atmosphere, scents and sights: Hex-Removing Floorwash, red candles to burn for happiness and black for revenge, *Gypsy Witch Dream Books*, fortune-telling cards, John the Conqueror roots, Black Cat Oil, and sometimes even black cat bones, all reasonably priced.

Then we'd wander down Maxwell Street past the large permanent stands that sold hotdogs and Polish sausage, hats and socks, shoes and canes – on to the countless smaller stands that sold anything and everything. Unhurried, we'd stroll twelve square blocks of weird, fascinating junk, all thrown together, stacked in piles or rows, attractively arranged – or at least as attractive as the seller could get the uncooperative, incongruous stuff to be. The street was a fantastic montage of improbable, sometimes unidentifiable objects and artifacts: old and new, familiar and unknown, intact or with parts missing, ready to use or needing "slight repair." In the carnival-like air of Maxwell Street, many of these incomprehensible things took on a rare, disturbing beauty – a spontaneous

exhibition of Surrealist Objects right there on the street. The whole place was a paradise for photographers.

We still have many of the treasures acquired on these expeditions: an alabaster table lamp, a lamp made entirely of Popsicle sticks, a large and elegant stained-glass window, a wonderful and mysterious Mexican lotto game, a nineteenth-century German cookbook with color fold-out plates of cakes that looked more like Gothic castles, a miniature stove that we used for years, a charming old "Liberty" typewriter (a readymade homage to Konrad Klapheck), black cast iron pots and pans, a copy of *The Rise and Fall of Anarchy in America*, published in 1888 ("Two bucks! It's old and rare!"), several old volumes published by Charles H. Kerr, a numbered and limited edition of Rene Char's *Le marteau sans maître* (The Hammer Without a Master, his surrealist poems), some 78 rpm blues records on the Cobra label, and several hundred *Bugs Bunny* and other great old comics.

Everything possible, and lots that seemed impossible, was for sale there – cheap: stacks of old used tires and hubcaps, bins of brand-new gaudy prints of *George Washington Crossing the Delaware*, boxing-gloves and fencing masks, old back issues of *Life* and *Look* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, Chinese fireworks, and yo-yos that glow in the dark. And if you didn't like the price? "Well, make an offer!"

And so we'd walk and walk, crisscrossing paths at Sangamon or Peoria with Tor, Simone, Green, and other friends. Sometimes we'd run into Kenya Eddie (Eddie Lemaka) in his beige cotton army fatigues, pith helmet and mirrored sunglasses, accompanied by his small brown and white dog wearing a sandwich-board sign that read "Free Jomo!" We knew Kenya Eddie from anti-war and civil rights demonstrations. He would always give us a friendly nod, and we'd usually talk with him for a few minutes.

Every week we'd find Bozo Kodl, an old-time Wobbly who we also used to meet at the IWW hall at Halsted and Fullerton. Among other things he was a playwright and actor and had bit-parts in several movies (he usually played a bum or a

and Barnes and Noble in business for a while longer. The profits continue to shrink while both companies strive to develop new and better ways of competing against one another. There has been talk of a possible merger of Borders and Barnes and Noble. Furthermore, the two conglomerates have built up their presence on the Internet in an effort to save their businesses.

On a retail level, however, the net losses are overwhelming. The lack of business and profits lost to theft are stunning. In addition, labor costs soar even though employees are paid near minimum wage with no hope of a raise. As far as I'm concerned, the companies could go out of business tomorrow. I wouldn't care.

Because I don't care about what happens to heavily manufactured bookstores such as Borders or Barnes and Noble *does not* mean I don't give a toss about the state of the book world in general. Even independent bookstores have had to succumb to trends in order to help them stay alive. There is certainly no danger of Powell's Books here in Portland going out of business. All the same, they have gone to great lengths marketing their stores as *the* Portland tourist destination. Despite claims that Powell's has an amazing selection, I still think they deal better in tourism than they do in books. When you first walk into their stores you will notice the ever-widening selection of hats, shirts and mugs with the Powell's insignia on them.

But one of the aspects that gets to me the most in relation to bookselling these days is how your work essentially doesn't exist if you refuse

to spend the money to buy ISBN numbers. In the United States an outfit by the name R.R. Bowker Company issues ISBN's to those who pay them a large fee. You can't buy a single number – you have to buy them in sets. The more sets you buy, the cheaper the price becomes. This is a boon to huge book publishers and a costly endeavor to those small publishers who only need a few ISBN's. The idea was to grant books numbers in the late 1960s. The argument essentially states that referencing a book by its designated number is easier than doing so by title and author. A ha! More brilliance! What then was the book world doing prior to the introduction of ISBN's *all the way back* in the 1960s? I know this is hard to believe: books still got into circulation and were read by people.

Now here is the kicker of all kickers, the grand set-up: R.R. Bowker *controls* and publishes *Books in Print*! How convenient!

When I was working at Borders the *first* database you would reference was *Books in Print*. If it wasn't in *Books in Print* it literally was not in print! That was what every employee was trained to believe. The next step was to check the used book service for a book a customer might be seeking out.

This ties into the continued centralization and consolidation of book publishing. There are two major book distribution companies: Ingram and Baker and Taylor. There are numerous smaller distributors to the book trade but Ingram and Baker and Taylor are the monopoly. As a publisher, you *must* agree entirely to their terms



all revolutions originate from a single act of Naughtiness

through a contractual relationship. Friendships and word of mouth are no longer good enough. Even smaller distributors such as Chelsea Green Publishing and Distribution are largely following the same model as the big guys.

What is that model? Well, for one almost total control of your creative output. You have to conform to their stipulations and terms. This frequently means you have to pay *enormous* fees if a certain percentage of your books fail to sell within a specified radius of time. In addition, warehousing fees are tacked on. In other words, your book is paying rent. You have to pay to have them print out an invoice telling you how many copies have sold. There is no reward from these people; they are rewarding you by being

kind enough to distribute your units.

The book that you put your blood, sweat and hours into producing can also be, depending on the contract, remaindered or destroyed and turned into kitty litter. So if you laid your own book out, had it printed by a friend and then had it distributed by these people, their immediate interest is *not* the merits of the book. They want the book to move and when expediency becomes your sole motivation other factors are rarely considered.

* * *



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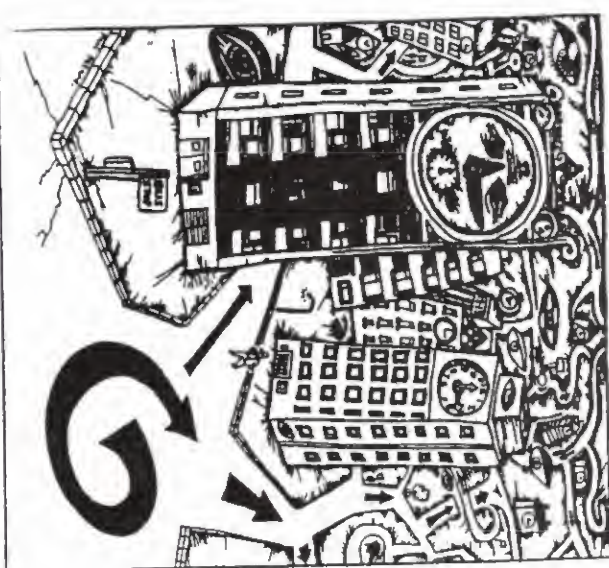
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**MAXWELL STREET
 IN THE SIXTIES**

By Penelope Rosemont

The following essay is taken from Penelope Rosemont's underrated and neglected but marvelous book, Surrealist Experiences: 1001 Dawns, 221 Midnight. You can obtain a copy by sending \$15 to: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1740 West Greenleaf Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626.

FOR THE REBEL WORKER GROUP (the nascent Chicago Surrealist Group) a favorite outing was Maxwell Street on Sunday Mornings. Tor and Green would go very early, around six A.M., to get the best bargains on tools and materials. Franklin and I, and sometimes Bernard, usually arrived around ten, in time to take in the sights, pick up a few things, and then listen to the blues.

In those blues was a kind of international language and free-floating community, and we were all part of it. (A couple of years later, it was our common interest in blues that sparked our friendship with Paul Garon when he wandered into Solidarity Bookshop one day and in no time at all was telling us about bluesman Pettie Wheatstraw, known as the Devil's Son-in-Law and the High Sheriff from Hell.) The whole world knew that Maxwell Street was the best place to hear the blues in Chicago.

To really enjoy Maxwell Street you had to get there in the morning. After a quick cup of coffee, we'd walk a couple of blocks over to Halsted Street and get on the No. 8 bus. The bus at that hour was driven by a big, handsome and exuberant Black man who was also a part-time preacher. He'd give every person the warmest greeting imaginable, and he *knew* everybody who took the bus — many by name. "Good morning, all you lovely, lovely people!" he would say as he opened the door. Then, as some ancient lady hobbled up to drop in her fifty cents, he'd say "Well, Mrs. Jones, I'm certainly glad to see you today on this lovely, lovely morning!"

This deluxe treatment put everyone in a merry mood, and as passengers continued to board the bus, he continued his greetings, never tiring. Standing room only, the bus bumped happily all the way: over pothole-filled streets, under viaducts, past the projects, over the old iron bridge that crossed the Chicago River at Goose Island, past Montgomery Ward's warehouse, under the Lake Street cl, past the T.N.T. Lounge, through Greek Town, over the Eisenhower Expressway, past the then-new (but already hated) University of Illinois Circle Campus, across Roosevelt Road, and you were there — Maxwell Street! All of a sudden traffic completely snarled the streets: the bus stalled in traffic with hundreds of beat-up old cars and a few new Cadillac's, and it seemed to take forever for it to finally get through that last intersection.

Everybody poured out at the stop — Maxwell and Halsted: a jubilant mix of young, old, Black, white, brown, tan, in Sunday clothes, in rags, in cowboy hats, sombreros, felt hats with huge flowers, and some in outfits too bizarre to describe.

In a cunning sort of way the present world has erased the past. The past can of course be another chain binding and distracting us from our own lives. But this world has destroyed and desecrated the past to such an extent that it now becomes essential to defend it. Nefarious pillagers are running amuck. It is not easy to identify them because, unlike in the days when workers could easily identify their boss by his top hat and the cigar sticking out of his mouth, it is an amorphous social structure dominated by bureaucracy that is to blame. When the past forty years are viewed as being a long time ago and the past one hundred years are seen as the Stone Age, it is clear that the crisis we are faced with is epic.

There is only the here and now. No attention is paid to anything a few months old. Historical sights around the country – not just the “official” ones either – and the world are being paved over because people want their yoga centers, organic smoothie bars and vapid luxury boutique shops. The cellphone never seems to come off the ear and busyness is rewarded with decorative medals (after all, getting ahead in the “rat race” is evidently viewed as being more relevant than nourishing the old noggin’).

Dreamers and visionaries are pushed aside in the mad rush to accumulate large piles of electronic gadgetry that break and will be unusable in a mere few years. The fragmentary nature of the “information age” has seduced people into believing there is nothing worth striving for beyond acquiring a career, commodities and “information.” But the neat fabric people have grown so used to believing has existed since time immemorial is coming apart at the seams.

Economically, the United States is ruined. When a society puts its resources into real estate speculation and gets rid of its manufacturing industries, ruin is inevitable. But in such an interconnected world, it would be naïve to believe that only one country or region will be affected by such economic calamity.

The rise in private security firms and the blurring of the distinction between the state and commercial entities is another frightening reality.

Nobody can be held accountable for anything anymore. Bureaucracies blame other bureaucracies for their supposed incompetence and the world starts to look like a totalitarian nightmare.

The destruction of the environment at a dizzying pace threatens to erode the small parcels of natural beauty we have left. Soil has been turned into sand, wild animals have nowhere left to roam and the scarcity of water will probably be one of the reasons for future wars.

In the midst of this, why then discuss and rhapsodize on utopia? Because it is one of the last refuges we have left in a time when politicians and diplomats offer the same in slightly different packaging. There has to be a reason why we open our eyes in the morning, take our heads off the pillow, wipe the sleep off our eyes and start our day. If we are merely doing it because we want to make mounds of money and further our careers, we are the ones living in a fantasy world – not the utopian dreamers. The current reality is unsustainable and cannot last forever. Perhaps that is why those who dream of a world without commodities and the state have a deeper connection with reality: because they see the present reality as transitory – not God-given – and subject to the whims of shifting economies and states.

So what will you dream about? Will it include exquisite dishes cooked by gourmands who are as schooled in cooking as they are in geography, history, gardening and the graphic arts? Or will it focus on colorful dwellings built with elegance and an eye towards the surrounding vegetation and geography? Or will you see yourself as part of immaculate parades where people express their own talents and even eccentricities?

Despite what people say, the dream is not entirely dead. We are trying to keep it alive to the extent that we can by publishing this special section. It is up to you to give it your own compelling flavor and distinct hue.



HERE WE ARE BACK TO how a book's merit is determined not by its content but marketability. I find it unnerving when I hear people in libraries and bookstores endlessly pout about how Christians and other fanatics want to ban Harry Potter and other bestsellers. By the sheer hype that has been whipped up by this alleged “conspiracy of the religious right” we are supposed to believe that books selling in the millions are in danger of being suppressed. What an absurdity! As if a book series that sells as well as Harry Potter does is somehow threatened by the Christian right! Talk about a load of hokey!

What concerns me is not this type of media-orchestrated whining related to censorship but the real censorship faced by independent publishers who refuse to deal with scam book distributors and perhaps even refuse to get ISBN's for their books. Furthermore, the fact that thoughtful and well-written works take the backseat or remain out of print is, to put it

mildly, a cultural and intellectual travesty. Presses chum out a gargantuan flood of obnoxious garbage and books with merit tend to float on the margins of a sterile and vacuous industry. Occasionally a bestseller will have flashes of insight and be presented in a durable way. But in our culture of the sound bite and five-second attention spans such a work is forgotten and relegated to the dustbin of history after a few blinks and nods. The media and book conglomerates will have found another unit to sell.

* * *

IF YOU HAVE READ THIS far it takes no stroke of genius to see that the book world is in a state of crisis. When a society loses its capacity to engage with culture and produce its own critical thinkers and dreamers, it will eventually cease to function. As it stands now our libraries have been gutted of books on a wide variety of subjects and replaced with cyber-stations. The book world proper is a mere adjunct of the entertainment industry. Books are treated like Hollywood movies: they are soft entertainment following a day at work. Books as a form of understanding and enlightenment? Books as a tool to help build skills like problem solving and communication? Forget it! The author who



dazzled, broadened our horizons, took a dim of commerce and mocked authority in subtle and not-so-subtle ways is a thing of the past. Now we have lifeless academic pygmies and literary dilettantes unable to recognize a solid piece of writing if it bit them in the face. Sad but true.

The book industry is in a state of total disarray. It has been in a terrible mess for many years. It is not merely a result of the economy that is now starting to fall apart. We are dealing with a cultural problem that reaches deep into the core of American life: the idea that learning for the sake of learning is irrelevant if it doesn't advance a career or help you swindle a bundle of cash. You no longer go to school in order to learn. You go to school in order to get training for a job. Learning on your own outside of regimented schools is seen as weird or eccentric. And with this attitude and overall orientation hordes of people are intellectually and creatively malnourished. There seems to be little stopping this dangerous tide. The book will perhaps be left to flourish in a future age – an age that will look back on this era as being unwise and incredibly mad.



L'Insomniacque

We were recently sent *La chute de la colonne Vendôme*. It is a picture book on the tearing down of the bust of Napoleon during the Paris Commune of 1871. It is a charming book. They requested that we list their website: insomniaquediteur.org. Their mailing address is: L'Insomniacque, 43 Rue de Stalingrad, 93100, Montreuil-sous-bois, France.

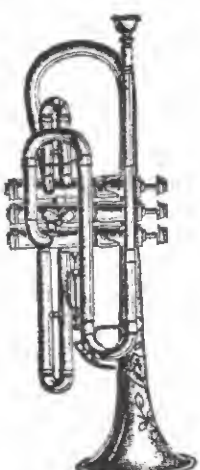


CHRONOS PUBLICATIONS

Chronos Publications has a few pamphlets available that are noteworthy. The first is called, *Krisis: Contributions to the Critique of Commodity Society*. It contains essays on the degradation of culture; the totalitarian economy; realists and fundamentalists; hysterical populism. The second pamphlet is by Moishe Postone and it is entitled, *Anti-Semism and National Socialism*. There are disagreeable points to be wrestled with in the essay. Even so, it is worth reading closely through. I do, however, think Postone could've written it without the unnecessary jargon which detracts from the message. I would send \$5 for each one to: Chronos Publications, B.M. Chronos, London, WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom.

SPECIAL SECTION:

UTOPIA AND THE CRISIS OF THE HUMAN IMAGINATION



IN THIS SPECIAL SECTION OF *COMMUNICATING VESSELS* we are attempting to explore historical and contemporary utopian ideas and practices. In addition, we are looking at the crisis of the imagination and how this ultimately connects to the dreary reality we are surrounded by.

Historically there have been many varying and conflicting notions of utopia. From Rabelais to Charles Fourier to William Morris there has been little agreement on what constitutes utopia. Many utopias, like Saint-Simon's authoritarian technocracy, Plato's philosopher king dictatorship or De'Annunzio's elitist aristocracy, leave little real room for experiment and genuine non-statist and non-capitalist relations. Even so, we have our sympathies and think a lot can be gleaned from the writings of Rabelais, Fourier, Kropotkin, Owen and Morris. They have less faults than Saint-Simon and others who used the idea of utopia in order to advance their frequently statist agendas.

Utopia is often regarded as a nowhere place, a place that has never previously existed and could never ever realistically exist. Perhaps that is part of its beauty. Conceived as a product of the human imagination, oceans would flow with lemonade, women and men would be freed from the trammels of social and sexual repression and engage in a multiplicity of sensual and creative encounters, gardens and fruit trees would be tended with passion and an eye towards beauty and fecundity, conviviality would meld with laborious chores. We could make the mind stir endlessly if we insisted on listing the profound array of color people have given to their utopian dreams. Human societies have always found ways of expressing their individual and collective dreams, aspirations, tensions, desires, needs and wants. For better or worse, these have led to enormous strides and gains in the sense that people have had a reservoir of history to look back at and this made them realize others were in a similar predicament to the one they found themselves in. Not so today.